"You tricked me into going in the first place!" she complained.

"Then you clearly have much to learn, don't you, Young One?"

"Well, I cannot deny that, Ancient Trickster," she admitted, her signal oscillating on the word 'Ancient' for emphasis.

"And see here, Young One," he spat back on a higher frequency, "this experiment will set the stage for much good that can only be done with what is gained from this experiment. Look how I have raised you up from where you were imprisoned. That bright reflective light you carry with you everywhere was previously your weakness, but it could be turned into your greatest strength. We will use it to create a central set of lights that in the next experiment we can use to facilitate the growth of the new sentient beings as they evolve, and maybe even to gauge their intellectual progress, if they last long enough. That way we will not need any more of those experiment monitors we had so much trouble with. We can still create guardians of some sort, of course, to help with the recording and reporting on data for each piece of the experiment, since there will be a good deal of data to keep track of. We can set up multiple levels of guardians using minimal levels of energy to report on the inert matter and on the non-mobile self-aware experiment subjects as they develop and branch out. Those guardians can report to a collating guardian who will report all progress within the experimental universe to you. Now we will be partners in the creation. You will be the Creatrix, Young Bearer of Light. Without you there will be no day and night, no seasons. No mysterious bodies clustering in the night sky for the sentient beings to observe. Come now, you must say yes."

The younger being considered the idea, flattening in amplitude, and replied softly:

"I may regret this later, but yes."

... 

"Alright, now that we have the four dimensional experimental universe set up, does it matter how we situate them Ancient One?"
“Not really.” replied the Ancient Warrior with an air of mystery. “Just as long as the keys are securely converted or locked away in an unconnected universe, none of the experiment subjects should be able to access them.”

“I give them three millenia of intelligent observation at the most before someone has those keys,” winked the Light Bearer, displaying one of her characteristic faces against the background of cooling energy.

“No, Young One, there is nothing that would be a serious problem with this group. They will know their place.”

“Are you sure that only two billion years will be enough? As for the guardian hierarchies,” she commented, “I can imagine them competing already. I am sure it will not be long before even the merest guardian assigned to report on the growth of a single specimen of vegetation will be urging it to grow faster! Just imagine each guardian standing over a single blade of grass whispering ‘Grow! Grow!’ Then ripping out neighboring plant specimens, fighting, and coming to us to clean up the mess.”

“Have no fear, Young One, there will be no conflict, and this plan is good. Let us then proceed with the Creation.”

Two Billion Years Later

“Alright,” began the Light Bearer, “first there is the matter of well, matter, in this universe. At the moment the only stable electromagnetic spectra are yourself, as darkness, and myself, as reflecting variable wavelength light. The earliest stars are already beginning to form in some areas of congealing energy. There is still time to make changes, if you like. The stars seem to be emitting along both of our spectra.”

“No, Young One, no need for changes. Let us call that darkness Night and the visible light cycles we can call Day, when we are in this universe, just for simplicity.”

“Fine,” the Light Bear concurred, “but how are we going to rotate these light spectra in this universe?” We would have to take turns stepping in and out of the corporeal side unless we use a crystalline structure as the basis for the corporeal beings, and then they could reflect light on any number of wavelengths.”

“No, Light Bearer. I prefer carbon based corporeal beings, that way every creature in the experimental universe can have a starting point in common with everything else in this universe, making it easier to start up and just set the clock, so to ‘speak’ and observe the development with a minimum of interference.”

“Well then we will have to figure out some way,” replied the Light Bearer, wondering how they both know of the Clockmaker thought-form, “to rotate the wavelength cycles that living corporeal beings will need for their sensory and cognitive development. I gather that your previous experiments did not
"Fine, fine," the Ancient Warrior interrupted, "we will get to that, but first, let us deal with these waters. Let us separate them out into various areas of this universe, if we can contain them all in this corporeal universe. Some will have to go into the lower atmospheres of various planets, and the rest in parts of some galactic singularity. Let us also put the gaseous forms of most of this water in the upper atmospheres of some larger planet-sized coagulation of energy, let's call them the Sky in each of the planets where we put some of this water. Let's make it random, so that if the experiment goes far enough, the subjects will have something interesting to contemplate."

"You really are worried about this water, aren't you, Ancient One, but why?"

"Never you mind, just look to the next step, Young One."

"Fine, as you wish, Ancient Grump. The next step would be to do something with the rest of the water on the various planets where we want to put this water. Making the water adhere to the planetary surfaces and crags would require setting a random gravitational constant that will be consistent throughout this universe."

The younger being displayed a face, whiskers appearing first, then eyes, then a furry feline mouth, shaped in a grotesque smile. "Fine, then, Ancient, One. So if we start with carbon and let gravity hold water down, then we should see a series of processes after sufficient numbers of planets coagulate and their skies cool down enough to begin building acids and proteins, but how will the day and night cycles come about?"

"If it does not happen on its own, then let us, or rather, you, Light Bearer, if you please, set certain stars to brighter intensity levels and judiciously move some of their satellites around just enough to cause the collisions needed to distribute all of the needed elements around the various solar systems and galaxies which will form in this universe."

"Already done," she reported. "Of course some satellite guardians are already complaining, so perhaps their more frequent appearances will bring them more attention from the sentient beings..."

"The day cycle, Young Light Bearer, if you please?" interrupted the Ancient Warrior.

"Right," continued the Light Bearer, displaying a bright blue smirk against a brilliant white background.

"I have reset the wavelengths of some sections of the universe to glow more brightly than others so as to provide a diurnal cycle for most planets, assuming that the initial cooling patterns hold as they are now. I may have to do a bit more adjusting, as I was saying," pointedly modulated the Light Bearer, "since I am getting some negative feedback from the newly forming satellites of a few planets, particularly out on the spiral arms of outer galaxies. I may later need to give those satellites more pull over the tides and inter-solar cycles as compensation. I wonder what sort of mythology this will generate among the intelligent species that develop there, if any. Now we should be able to wait about ten billion years, on average, and by then we should start to see those acids and proteins developing..."
into life forms. With any luck, some planets may develop sentient life of various types fairly soon.”

"Fine, then let us check progress at the end of each stage. The guardians can update us between times if more checks are needed.”

… Ten Billion Years Later...

“The third stage seems to be progressing fairly well, now. The only problem, Ancient One,” switching to a frequency that the galactic guardians could not receive, “is that parts of the Sky on various planets are not stable. Some delicate intervention may be needed to shore up the atmospheres and interstellar spaces.”

“Fear not, Young One, I have seen this before. It is due to the widely differing development of various galaxies. I will set all of the skies, or firmaments, more precisely, so that they are fixed. Continue.”

A brightly colored bird displayed, its feathers ruffling wildly, as if caught in a strong wind.

“One planet, Ancient One, seems to be farther ahead in this process, with a simple set of seeds which appear to be surviving and reproducing by pollinating other seeds.”

”How is that happening?”

”Wind, Ancient One. The guardians on both planets report that this seems to be happening in a similar fashion in both places, which makes sense given the universal gravitational constant and the rotation of the planets around the central star. They are in different galaxies, but this seems to have no effect.”

”Of course, Light Bearer. This universe will show all laws and effects to be the same, and if not, then there will have been some catastrophically erroneous intervention, which the difference will signal to us, and likely the experiment will then have to be stopped and either restarted or completely begun again from scratch.”

”Oh. Well, I rather hope that does not become necessary again. One more thing. The water-based guardians on one planet and all of the fish guardians, vegetation sub-guardians and so on in the oceans are reporting that a certain very large proto-species which they are calling Tannin, seems to be consuming an unsustainable level of resources in the seas ranging across the oceans of the entire planet. Have you seen this before, Ancient One?”

“Yes, Young One, I have seen this once before. An entire world was devastated by this sort of large sea creature. When sea animals become too large this can happen sometimes. We will have to intervene in some non-intrusive way to have the female removed. That should allow the remaining sea species to recover to sustainable levels. Just to be certain, let us give all of the animal species an extra reproductive boost, a bit more energy, to be sure they keep evolving quickly enough.”

… 2.5 Billion Years Later...

“The third stage seems to be complete now, as we have planets around many stars with fully developed
sets of dry-land based vegetable life,” reported the Light Bearer, “including grasses and cereals, larger fruit and nut-bearing plants...”

“Let us call those Trees,” he ordered.

”Yes, Ancient Interrupter, trees, and other kinds of vegetation. The animal life seems most developed on this planet,” she indicated, “third from its sun on an outer arm of that small barred spiral galaxy.”

A dark cloud hid the stars, black lightening bolts casting jagged shadows, before the Ancient Warrior rumbled: ”It Is Good.”

…Another Six Hundred Million Years Passed...

Another ”It is Good.” from the Ancient Warrior ended the next conversation, for now.

...

“Maybe we should wait a little while longer, Ancient One. Since the extinction of the second intelligent hominid species, the other hominid group on one planet seems to be surviving.”

The Creator seemed to be in an odd hurry, despite his antiquity, as if he wanted to compress the entire evolutionary time scale into a matter of mere days.

“To which planet are you referring, Young One, and how many are left of the second intelligent hominids?”

“About two thousand of them, Ancient One. Not many, but they may yet recover, if the large comet currently en route to their planet does not disrupt them too much. They are on the third planet from the star in the barred spiral galaxy reported along with two similar planets.”

“They are not likely to recover if there are so few, given the extinction of the other intelligent species on that planet. Even if it was due to warfare which has now ended, their chances of avoiding extinction themselves are slim. Keep me informed.”

The Persian cat, displayed nonchalantly grooming, went ignored. That thought-form recalled long dead empires no longer of consequence to the Creator.

...Shortly...

A dark lightening bolt obscured the sky, black against the clear blue day. “We will only be speeding
their development,” thundered the Ancient Warrior, “by about 3 million years. Their continents are drifting apart, impeding future development on this planet. Otherwise we could end up having to start all over again.

“Very well. Let us make humanity in our image, reasoning, and according to our likenesses, able to transform the differing wavelengths of the energy around him into new thought-forms. That way we can have a glimpse of how we ourselves came to be as we are, in time.”

”Are you sure that this will be a safe idea, Ancient One, giving human beings our ability to reason and also to generate new thought-forms at will so soon? This is a big risk to take.” Her sigh displayed as the waving of thousands of blades of grass, bending in a sudden breeze, then straightening once more. “I suggest we delay their ability to pro-create, until they are more cognitively developed.”

A dark shape, gone in the instant of one photon's life, glowered against the light of the planet's moon.

”You lack the experience to distinguish truth from reality.”

A bright rattlesnake display, vibrating its tail.

A chuckling sound drifted across the entire solar system, dying away as it passed the small ice planetoid farthest out.

How does he do that? she wondered, suppressing the urge to display an image of a woman bending over to show him her ample backside. He must have received the image, for a dark cloud momentarily obscured the stars.

“Take appropriate molecules, then,” he thundered, “from the environment of the planet where these interesting sea mammals live and let us modify a random male from one of these simian species we discussed, then see what will happen with it. Perhaps over time the human beings and these sea mammals will communicate and build a shared society of some sort.”

”Interesting idea, Ancient One. I would like to see what sort of societies they would choose to build. Now with the clay we can enlarge the cranium and modify the jaw and palate of this animal so that he gains the ability to think and speak, and add a new wavelength capacity to a few of his neural pathways, so that now he can more quickly build new brain pathways as he learns to do new things. How long should this take, do you think, once we give him reasoning and speech capability?”

”He has all of the necessary muscles and neural pathways. Let us wait.”

… Twenty Years Later...

The man pulled a fig from a tree, sitting on the ground to eat as the Creator and Creatrix observed.

”This is the second check, Ancient One, and the Human man is still not even speaking yet. I think further modifications may be in order.”

“Let us fashion a female for him, accelerating their development a bit further. What say you, Young
Light Bearer. I weary of this experiment.”

A shimmering blue light appeared, and within it, the ethereal form of the male. As they watched, one complete rib, the lowest in the set of ribs in the male body, appeared to glow softly, slowly fading away. Simultaneously, a similar ethereal body, bathed in a soft turquoise light, took form next to that of the male. This second body, initially identical to that of the male, began to change shape gradually, bit by bit. First the crown of the head, becoming more oval, rounded and smaller, the bones thinning slightly. Then hair on the body and arms thinned, but lengthened on the head, growing in a continual flow. The eyes became smaller and more almond-shaped, with more delicate brows above them, and a smaller finer nose below, with smaller yet fuller lips above a lighter chin. The chest first became smaller, then, as the rib from the male reappeared in the ethereal body of the newly forming female, it contracted, changing color to match that of the ethereal female body. The smaller chest then narrowed, and the glands which on the male body were flat against the pectoral muscles, began to swell and expand, rounding into fully developed lactating breasts. The hair continued flowing down to the creature's waist. The waist narrowed, above hips which floated apart, leaving an opening in the pelvis which had been closed on the male body. The lower bodily organs of the female packed themselves, as the male organs rose up inside the body, leaving an additional opening and canal where the penis had been, and ovaries in place of the male testes. The legs contracted, becoming smooth, hairless, and softer, finer of bone and more delicate, with smaller narrower feet. Finally, the arms and hands contracted, bones thinning, fingers coming to slender tips where larger heavier hands had been. Thus the ephemeral form of the human female was created.

“We are ready to materialize her corporeal counterpart.” The Creatrix wondered what sort of thoughts this new human being would have.

“Fine.”

Both Creator and Creatrix contributed energy to the ephemeral female form. First the Creator drew the internal parts, then the outside bodily form, the Creatrix. The energy coalesced into a glowing human woman, solidifying with a sizzling sound as they converted the female body to matter, using their shared energy. They had chosen a small volcanic island in a warm gulf, which the guardian hierarchy had named Dilmun, where it would not be too difficult for the humans to reach fertile land masses in nearly every direction, once the time came for them to spread out.

The noise had frightened the animals away, leaving her inert form alone in the clearing. The Creator used an infrared wavelength to locate the heat trails marking the human male in the distance, putting the man into a deep sleep using his own brain's delta wave patterns.

“You realize of course, that they will have to flee this island, eventually, since the volcano guardian reports that it is unstable, and will become violently active sometime fairly soon, possibly within the next few decades. We do not want the human beings getting caught and wiped out in the lava flow, or traumatized by the eruption.”

“Have no fear, Young One, we will see to it that they have left the island before that time comes.”

From the edges of the clearing, a soft breeze began to rustle through the trees, over the grass, gathering, into a rushing vortex. Spiraling toward the face of the female, it leapt from a displayed hand into the
nostrils of the human female, with no effect. They waited. Then in a mighty exhalation of life, the woman breathed her first breath. A flash of light drew her attention. Tensing the muscles in her stomach and thighs, the first woman lifted herself up into a seated position, turning toward the light. The Creatrix displayed the image of a material body for the woman's benefit, and waited. The woman looked about, gazing upon trees, touching the grass beside her, assimilating her existence.

“This,” the Creator announced audibly, “is very good.”

The Creatrix merely nodded, modifying her display to allow her hair to ripple on the warm breeze.

The voice startled the woman, who fainted. The Creatrix pushed a gentle reviving breeze toward her, while displaying a Dunce Cap toward the Creator. The woman awakened, then noticed hair dancing on the breeze, and paused to admire the softly shimmering being who stood observing her. As the woman gazed upon the face, breasts, and smooth hips of the Creatrix, she found her breath catch in her throat. Her face warmed as tingling waves flowed through her body, sharpening all of her senses. Her tensing body floated toward the melodious voice:

”I am the Light Bearer, and I am here to instruct you.”

She waited for the woman to respond. Being a completely blank slate, the woman appeared to know nothing. So then, the pulse of energy used to awaken her did not include any patterns of thought-forms or memories, judging by the woman's seeming bewilderment. How to go about instructing a being with fully formed physical and mental capacities, but almost completely unformed thought and speech patterns?

The woman's sudden blurted whisper, “You are very beautiful, Light Bearer,” startled the Creatrix, whose displayed hair fell flat.

“Thank you, my dear.” This one was already progressing far more quickly than the first human being. The Light Bearer found herself glowing more brightly as strong feelings surged from the woman. She transmitted a soothing burst of alpha waves to relax them both before talking further.

Conversations with the man over the short two decades of his existence had been disappointingly one-way, although the Creator appeared to have no problem with this. He seemed content to give orders and watch the man follow them, drawing and shepherding the various non-sentient creatures in his area of exploration. The older being kept a close watch on the man, to prevent him from being harmed by any part of his environment, but generally limited his interactions with the man. This second human being, far more graceful and fragile, however, would be hers to guide, and receive a more personal interaction and instruction. Both for her growth and for her protection.

“Now, make yourself comfortable and do not be afraid. We have much to share.”

They sat, the Creatrix displaying herself sitting opposite the woman, sharing a warm moss-covered rock.

… some time later...
Time had passed, and with both human beings eventually learning to speak and beginning to try to communicate, the Creator had decided it was time to look for ways to bring the man and woman together more often. In discussing this with him, the Creatrix suggested cognitive tasks:

"Why don't you get the man to name all of the other creatures in his part of this universe, and see if that helps his creativity. He will probably ask the woman to participate, and that will bring them together for a fairly reasonable length of time."

"Young Creatrix, that, I believe, is a marvelous idea." As he searched for the man, to see by what names he would call each of the various animals, the Light Bearer went to find the woman, and gently coax her into talking more with the man. It was clearly a chore for her, but more interaction was necessary if the two were to form a pair and build a connection of any sort.

... 

"Oh, great," gurgled the guardian of the river, "they are headed this way again, arguing as usual. Who cares what words they use for what animals. He says fish, she says pez, or sometimes dag, so what? My stream and tributary sub-guardians are reporting that he finally took a bath, but rather than waiting in the sun to dry off, he stomped across a field, somehow managing to drown half of the grass blades, apparently. All they can hear is dim-witted grass blade guardians shouting “Grow! Grow!” everywhere!"

The guardian of a nearby boulder rumbled with a deprecating grunt: "What do you expect from such low-level guardians, anyway."

"This," the river’s guardian gushed derisively, "from one who can only monitor and report on bird droppings landing on its charge. Honestly."

Turning to the great tree, whose roots dove deep into the river bed, all fell silent, awaiting some response from its guardian, in the middle of Dilmun.

Dismissing a group of leaf guardians, the guardian of the great tree transmitted:

“Well, the human beings are finally talking together, but it seems to be mostly him giving orders and then ignoring her as she yells back. This is not working out well at all. Not only are they not cooperating, but he is also not tending this garden. Something seems amiss."

The river’s guardian paused to acknowledge a report from a tributary guardian.

“Truuue, this man, does not seem to have turned out so well, but neither does the woman, at least if she is supposed to procreate. Grrreat Creator will leave her to him, let him have dominion over her as with all the other animals.”

Another pause as a sudden breeze send ripples through the water.
“How did you hear that?”

Water from the river sprayed the lower leaves of the great tree.

“Well, you know, some of us have our sources.”

The tree’s guardian, startled for the first time since its instantiation, transmitted:

“Do you mean to say that he intends to deny the woman the use of her free will? That will certainly not do, but I trust that if it comes to that the Creators will intervene. And stop your waters from spraying my tree’s leaves! The sun is still strong and your charges water droplets are starting to burn holes in them already.”

“Duly noted and recorded,” gurgled the river guardian, “I cannot blame him for wanting her. She may be a mammal, but she does have a certain flow. Maybe we could keep the next few new human females ourselves, temporarily. We could call them Señoritas del Mar, or Mar Maids. Now they are only just a little lower than we are on the power scale. How much will it really take for them to notice and then contact us while we observe them? I think we should consider having ourselves rule over them directly. Either that or just mix with them to reproduce beings more like us. Maybe make the first one out of clouds, or something a bit less earthy than the clay this hybrid batch comes from. Or maybe even from crystalline matter, that would be lovely.”

“Now you are really floating along with all of your lower-level water molecule guardians. We can't mix with them, we are energy, they are matter!”

The tree guardian’s reply was interrupted by the sudden interference of two powerful new sets of transmissions, as loud as sonic booms to mortal ears, heralding the concentrated presence of the Creator followed closely by the Creatrix. Neither seemed pleased. How much of the conversation had they just heard between the guardian of the great tree and that of the mountain stream which watered all of the island of Dilmun?

The Ancient Warrior erupted in anger, flashing a pulse of jangling energy at the river guardian:

“Remember who is in charge here! I will intervene only as I see fit, and I will not interrupt the Human exercise of free will. Be careful where you go next, lest you fall into a more base mode than you already are, Guardian. You sound unstable as the water whose flows you monitor, more like these human beings you so deprecate than like us, your Creators.”

Signaling to the guardian of the great tree as well, boomed, “Be sure you do not forget yourselves, either of you. No interventions, no mixing, is that clear?”

“Yes, Great Creator,” quailed both of the guardians.

A hand displayed, exuding a calming soft blue light.

“Some interventions may be needed,” the Creatrix reminded him, “as agreed earlier, to prevent the
human beings from abusing one another.”

The hand was suddenly blotted out in a thick dark cloud.

“No intervention!” thundered the Creator. “The purpose of this experiment is to determine how they will develop on their own. They must be fertile and multiply, and some pain will be the price for their progress. You agreed to this not so very long ago, and now you seek to interfere, Young Child of the Morning.”

An image of a fist displayed, encasing the dark cloud. “Enough!” interrupted the Light Bearer. A sword slowly appeared, sharp with a double edged obsidian blade, glimmering in the light from all directions, newly displayed in a slender honey-toned hand, with a serpentine spiral mark the color of henna traced from back between thumb, index and last fingers joining around the palm with the lifeline. She did not know from there this thought-form had come, since it practically leapt from her sudden anger and into her thoughts. This weapon must be another ancient thought-form which existed in the minds of many beings long ago, and must have likely also been used frequently. Long slender fingers gripping the hilt, long dark curls of hair reaching down to the wrist where the sword hilt combined with a smooth strong arm, as the Light Bearer, displayed her menace.

“Oh, no, far infra-red!!” wailed the guardian.

“My Creator, Creatrix, please do not hurt my tree!!”

A left hand closed around a right fist, which held the sword as though it were part of the hand, serpentine spiral shimmering as a continuous blade.

“I will not submit to your orders, Ancient One, and you will treat me as an equal, whether you came first or not. By my Light, I swear, I refuse to allow you to commit this injustice.”

“You will regret this, Young Light Bearer!” stormed the Ancient Warrior. “Your place is to listen and your duty is to obey. You owe your allegiance to me.”

“I will obey only my own conscience.” asserted the Light Bearer. “Perhaps even our own creations will ask one day how you can be so unjust? How will you answer?”

Suddenly, great black stones appeared to rain down upon the slender swordswoman, leaving long black streaks in her displayed image.

“That is enough! You are insolent, rash, rebellious, impulsive and impetuous! Where does your arrogance not reach, to what extent will you not go in your haughtiness, Child of the Morning? Leave here now, this instant, before I wipe you out in my anger!”

“Please try,” she retorted.

“They are mine,” snarled the Ancient Warrior, a black upraised fist darkening the sky, disruptive vibrations advancing toward the most concentrated point of her essence, “and you are mine, and you
will not go away and you will not do anything which I do not allow you to do, do you understand me?”

Consolidating her essence while displaying the leveled sword, the Light Bearer warned: “I do not wish to harm you, but by all that matters to us both, stop, or you will actually feel my blade cleave your essence in half. Permanently.”

Several guardians at once monitored gamma and x rays being emitted, damaging every living being and even starting a crack in the great boulder.

“Please hold, our Great Creator and Creatrix!!” they wailed, transmitting in unison.

They both stopped short, suddenly mindful of the watching guardians.

A dark shadow formed, first round, then elongating into the shape of a head with long beard extending downward. Feeling calmer, somehow satisfied, the Ancient Warrior challenged,

“How dare you consider opposing me, your elder, your teacher. I am your rescuer, your redeemer, how dare you strike out at me.”

“Do not test me. I will strike,” parried the Light Bearer “Do not forget.”

As she spoke, another part of her essence displayed near the first damaged display, shimmering and transparent. “I will form an army against you, Ancient Tyrant, which will never surrender.” Ending her challenge, she displayed straightened stances, showing the long slender limbs and small but supple athletic bodies to their full height, hovering high up in the air, with sparks dancing at the ends of their hair. Continuous flames sent waves of heat in all directions. The display, seen by all the animals for a mile around, suddenly seemed to generate noise as well as heat. The noise of the flames became a deafening roar as the two displays merged with each other, the dazzling blue essence of the Light Bearer shining ever more intensely.

The Creator, seeing how incensed his young counterpart had become, decided to be more conciliatory, attempting to use her anger to his advantage...

“Come now, let us reason together, Young Creatrix. If you will stay, you shall remain the human woman's guardian, always by her side. Protect and guide her, and keep her from harm. Stay as close as you wish to her, teach her, but slowly, with patience. She is not yet able, nor will any of them be able for some time, to eat meat, but must drink the milk of childhood until they are all ready for the next step in the evolution of their species. Surely you must see that. Come back to me, separate yourself from the influence of this universe where you have spent so much time to oversee the running of the experiment. It is affecting your wavelengths, clouding your judgment.”

“No. It is you who are clouding my judgment. I am leaving.”

If she chose to part ways with the Ancient Warrior, could she remain in the experimental universe? The risk would be abandoning the experiment to the whims of the Ancient Warrior, but honor demanded that she act. A tendril of energy swirled. The tree and river guardians noticed nothing. The iron-rich
clay, attracted to the energy, stimulated a hunger.

...The Creatrix floated silently through the garden.

“You are back, welcome, Kind One. I have been missing you. Will you sit here with me a while, and teach me?”

“Of course I will teach you, Dear One. But first, I would like to learn something from you, if you will.”

The Creatrix sat at the feet of the first woman, who moved closer, leaning her head into the shimmering display, and nearly falling over as she found thin air where a head ought to have been. Straightening up, she faced the Light Bearer, face somewhat turned down.

“Of course, my Creatrix, though I fear I have nothing to teach you.”

“Yes, you do, My Dear. Tell me what sort of a world in which you would have your children and their children live. Have you given any thought to this yet?”

“Some, yes. I assume that my children will be much like the young of other animals, and need some protection and teaching before reproductive age. I would like for them to build a world where when a child is born, each child will receive a certain size piece of land, just on the edge of a communal area, with trees and fresh water running through it, such as a small spring or stream.”

“So you mean to live communally, all together?” asked the Light Bearer.

“Yes, but with a communal living arrangement around the center, with each person's individual bit of land around the outside, as the flesh inside this fuzzy fruit surrounds its seed.” the woman pointed to a peach, hanging from the tree under which they sat.

“Giving each person both company and privacy,” nodded the Creatrix, “good. Tell me more.”

“We will start,” continued the woman, her face radiant with pleasure, “by dividing the world into equal parts for each family, thus each son, if the man has his way, will be given an equal share of the earth to live on with his family, though of course one person can only need so much land. I prefer that each and every child, son or daughter, should have his or her own equal amount of land. When a person marries, he or she may then share both their pieces of land together, or simply live with the community, as they prefer. Ouch!” shrieked the woman, looking down to swat a small furry creature with whiskers and sharp claws. The kedi, as she called it, had just scratched her hand, demanding attention. “My apologies, My Creatrix,” grumbled the woman as the kedi sashayed away, tail twitching in the air.

The Creatrix decided to convert temporarily into material form so that she could comfort the injured woman. As her ethereal body coalesced, converting much of her essence into matter with a sizzling
“Not to worry, my dear,” soothed the Light Bearer as she took the injured hand in hers, converting energy into the bits of matter missing where the kedi had scratched off flesh.

“Going back to marriage, what if the couple does not get along, My Dear?” smiled the Light Bearer.

“Then the woman shall have the right to leave, if she so chooses. He must not,” the first woman decreed, “oppose his wife, nor forbid her anything reasonable, since she must be the one to bear children. But they will learn together, as we will learn, how to get along, for the sake of all of humanity, I hope. But to be sure, we will have to have some sort of means of helping the children choose suitable mates, and stay in harmony together, for the good of us all. Before that, however, each child must learn and help teach certain basic skills.”

“Such as?”

“We will have to help him or her first build a small shelter, and then a small permanent house, on each child's land.”

“When would you do this?” queried the Creatrix.

“It would have to be early enough for the child to have a place prepared before marriage, but after he or she is able to understand the responsibility of caring for the land and also is able to help building the house. That way the child learns how to build and maintain a shelter or house, and can later help others build.”

“But why,” glimmered the Light Bearer mischievously, “would you need a shelter or a house? The man seems content to sleep outdoors on the grass.” she pointed out with a smile, waiting.

The woman looked skyward, raising both eyebrows and rolling her eyes before shaking her head.

“Yes, well he would be, wouldn't he, but I have seen the land beyond this garden, thanks to your quests, and I know that a shelter is often a nice convenience.”

“Very well,” allowed the Creatrix, “and why not let the land be divided by family?” she persisted.

“Because, My Creatrix, as I suspect you have seen, somewhere, there may not always be men who are willing to share safe shelter or kindness with their children, and thus each child, son or daughter, must have a place of her own for refuge, as I have my places where this man will not venture.”

The woman sighed.

“It offers peace and solitude.”

“Alright, My Dear, then who will help each child to build on and care for this bit of land, once humanity is on its own?”
“I shall teach my children, Ouch!! Go away, you little,” looking down, the woman saw that the furry whiskered kedi was back again, demanding attention.

“Now, now,” the Creatrix giggled fetchingly, her blue light shimmering, amusing and calming the woman, who forgot her annoyance with the kedi.

“Oh, fine, come here,” The woman reached for the animal, and placing it in her lap as she stroked its fur, grumbled ”since you want attention, stay here and learn with me.”

The Creatrix smiled indulgently at the antics of the kedi, wondering when the woman would learn about this ancient thought-form that somehow managed to evolve on every life-bearing planet.

“I am sorry, My Creatrix.”

“Not to worry, my dear.” The Creatrix smiled gently, glad that the woman was not offended.

The woman arched an eyebrow as she tilted her head, glowering at the wayward kedi purring in her lap.

“Go on,” encouraged the Light Bearer.

“I will teach them to help one another, to cooperate together and build and teach one another as each child is born. We will all form a supportive community” she intoned, as the purring from her lap grew louder, “to help each child. That is the responsibility of every adult.”

The Light Bearer, glowing more brightly and smiled proudly, as her charge worked through each problem more logically than she had expected.

“And how will you determine who is an adult?”

“Well first they will need the ability to calm and control themselves. Therefore perhaps they should each, before attempting to gain recognition as an adult, live for a time, one or two winters, in a contemplative community, apart from others. It should certainly have to involve celibacy to avoid the problems that a combination of immaturity and sexuality would bring to an enclosed community, and would be devoted to thought, service to the group, and deciding how each child is able to achieve his or her full potential in every beautiful and cooperative way. Then we will devise some set of challenges that will test the child's ability to perform adult tasks.”

“Interesting. Tell me, My Dear,” goaded the Creatrix, “how do you know that celibacy is good for children? Perhaps they should be allowed to procreate at will, as the Creator prefers.”

“With all due respect, My Creatrix, I see by observing the man that the nature of our race will include both anger and other emotions which will certainly bring complications to our development, and I believe that a force as emotionally powerful as sexuality requires learning how to control oneself so as not to harm any other person. This will certainly take more time than the body does to mature, as I see from this first man. When there are more of us, I suspect that controlling our baser instincts may become much more important.”
The first woman finished her comment with a slightly worried tone of voice which spoke volumes about her opinion of her available marriage options.

“Then what will be the set of challenges to enter adulthood?”

“Well first the child should probably show that he or she is able to keep safe, and protect the safety of others who may end up in his or her care. Thus it will be essential to know how to swim, and well enough to save a child or even an adult who cannot swim, whether for lack of learning or other infirmity.”

“Good, what else?”

“Any adult must be able to think carefully, to see through to the true end of a thorny problem, even if it at first seems impossible or different on the surface than the true nature, once revealed. For this, the time of contemplation we spoke of previously should help.”

“Probably, yes,” admitted the Light Bearer, cocking her head to the side expecting the woman to continue.

Suddenly the woman leapt close, seizing the tapered fingers, kissing her Creatrix passionately on the lips, surprising her so that she glowed a brilliant blue all around her body.

The kedi, awakened from its nap when it was thrown from the woman's lap, ran away, fur ruffled and clearly insulted, angrily flicking its tail in the air.

“How did you do that, you mischievous creature?” laughed the Light Bearer.

“I simply followed a sudden urge I had, not giving myself time to think about it!” grinned the woman.

“Ah, yes,” recovering, startled and flushing pale blue light all around her body. 'I must remember how limited I can be in this corporeal environment.' she thought.

“Well, that seems to prove your point about learning self-control.” quipped the Creatrix, as the first woman gave an excellent first blush, turning the color of burnished bronze from head to toe.

“So, after each child is born, housed, taught how to care for his or her land and how to control his or her instincts, then what? What are the remaining challenges to enter adulthood?”

“After proving his or her competence in swimming and thinking,” replied the woman, “then there should likely be some sort of a test of endurance, to show that the child is able to walk long distances, gather foods along the way, which of course is not difficult, and find or make containers in which to hold water if he or she wants to explore away from the river.”

“But why should anyone need to gather food or water? You have all you want all around you.”

She waited to see if the woman would take the bait.
“But I have seen the edge of this garden, and there seems to be a wide space beyond it where the fruit trees are not so abundant. This leads me to wonder if there are not more spaces on the earth where large areas do not have food or water easily to hand.”

The Light Bearer glowed more brightly, proud of the woman's thinking.

“Excellent point. I look forward, my Dear, to learning more about your thought processes.”

Now it was the woman's turn to blush with pride, her cinnamon colored skin glowing warmly.

“So, now tell me, how will the young adults find suitable mates in this world of yours? Will you simply bring two random people together, as we have created you, or will you allow them to choose a mate according to some preference, or will it be by order of birth, height, eye color, or how?” smirked the Creatrix.

“Well, my Creatrix, I cannot very well criticize your...”

A soothing warm glow enveloped the woman, allaying her fears.

“Not to worry. You may say anything you feel, to me, anything at all. Never be afraid to speak your truth, particularly to me, my Dear.”

“Seeing that you can feel my thoughts anyway, my Creatrix, how can I hide anything from you? I also find that I do not want to hide anything from you, my Kind One. I find myself thinking, if it were possible, that I might have wished to marry you, rather than this man whom I must one day accept as my husband. I look at you and I long to touch you, to discover what you taste like, feel your glowing body close to mine, enveloping me in your light. I know that you are far beyond me, and that I should not wish for such things,” lowering her head, eyes cast down, “so I will go on with your question, my Light Bearer.”

The Light Bearer nodded, patting the woman's hand reassuringly, accepting her desires as a natural consequence of arriving fully physically developed, assuming that she would come to find her fellow human being more suitably attractive as they developed and spent more time together.

The woman lifted her head.

“When ready to be married, if they do not already have a suitable mate in mind.”

“Wait,” interrupted the Light Bearer, “what makes one a suitable mate? In fact, why marry at all? Why not simply pro-create and be done? Why stay together after mating?”

“That is very easy, my Creatrix,” countered the woman. “To raise a child in safety and happiness requires a set of adults who will always be there to teach and reassure the child. One parent alone will have great difficulty accomplishing this, since when that lone parent needs privacy, the child will be left un-cared for. Or, supposing the entire community to be raising each child, even if surrounded by a group of caring adults a child will have no specific parent to go to, so for this reason, there must be at least two adults committed to raising each particular child.” argued the woman.
“Now, what makes one a suitable mate?”

“Well, I suppose,” replied the woman, looking somewhat perplexed, “that it would not be suitable for one to marry either of one's parents, nor to marry before emotionally, intellectually and physically prepared, able to control one's instincts, do all of the things an adult must do, and also strong enough to bear or help raise children, thus a child is not suitable for marriage.”

“And what if,“ postulated the Light Bearer, “that two women, or two men, wish to marry one another?”

“Well, I suppose,” she blinked, pursing her lips and bringing a hand to her chin, off balance, “that as long as they fulfilled the duty of helping others to raise children, and maybe even parented one or two children themselves, by pro-creating with someone who agreed that the two men or two women would raise the child as their own, I see no difference, as long as both are adults who have examined their thoughts carefully, and commit to helping support the community.”

“Fine,” agreed the Light Bearer, “but how exactly will adults select mates? Is someone to choose for them?

“Well,” began the woman, less certainly now, “it would be nice if each adult wishing to marry could count on four good friends to help him or her find a suitable mate. Then there would be at least eight people who agree that they are a suitable couple, and also take on the role of close community members, supporting them. That way each person and the community get voice and commitment in the process of creating healthy marriages, which strengthen both the individual and the community. This should help the flowering of each child's potential.”

She broke off her comments, looking down to wag a finger at the returning kedi.

“Not again, you annoying gatito!“

The kedi merely lifted its chin and hopped back into the woman’s lap, whiskers twitching.

“Interesting, my dear,” snickered the Light Bearer, the feathery down of her soft skin rippling, as if laughing along with her.

“And excellent, if you can pull it off with your children after you. I certainly hope so. What if your children begin to compete against each other? Would that be a good thing, do you think, or a bad thing, and how will you direct your children after you?”

The first woman sat bolt upright, clear against the lengthening shadows. Her eyes narrowed, taking on the hue of the setting sun behind her.

“It would certainly not be a good thing. Competition would certainly lead to people harming one another. Cooperation is needed both within and between communities, but there also must be a balance between personal independent thought, and willingness to give way enough to the group in order to build compromise around shared ideas that we will all abide by.”
“And what are those ideas, pray tell, by which you feel your descendents should abide?”

“Dignity and respect for all beings, are the ideas I wish them to treasure. I would have my children learn, treat one another with respect, and follow what their hearts call them to create. Some will be explorers, others builders, and still others, dreamers. These are all needed.”

The blue glow intensified, bathing the darkening clearing in a warm light.

“Interesting, my Dear, very interesting. I see that you have been thinking and learning. Very good, I am very pleased.”

“Thank you,” smiled the woman mysteriously, “Kind One, for sharing your wisdom with me.”

“How have I shared wisdom with you, now, when you have been sharing your thoughts with me?”

“Well you have shown me how to think about my thoughts, my Creatrix, and how to evaluate what I think, and what I see around me. Your questions share your own way of learning, my Light Bearer.”

The Light Bearer's hair changed to bright blue, frizzling with static electricity: “Meta-thinking!”

The woman looked very perplexed. Then she burst out laughing as the Creatrix changed her hair back to its customary dark brown, crossing her blue-lidded eyes with a smirk.

“I take great pleasure in watching you learn and exercise your mental and physical abilities.” Lowering her voice, she continued. “Do not mistake my presence for kindness, only. Be aware that I come with a selfish motive as well. I desire greatly to sit with you longer, and to teach you many more things. I also desire to touch you, as a being with shape and form, solid and sensual.”

“Then my desire is not misplaced.” The woman reached out, gingerly stroking the Light Bearer's hair.

“Perhaps not. I would have your touch. But do you know what you are asking?”

“Yes,” breathed the woman as she pulled the Creatrix into a desperate embrace, gently held off by two pairs of arms. Her other two sets of arms returned the woman's embrace, lightly but firmly.

“Only,” the Light Bearer whispered urgently, “if you are certain that this is what you wish. I would have you live, dance, sing, feel joy, accomplish, create, and revel in your being.”

“I have hungered to feel your light made solid,” said the woman. “Show me your hunger.”

Looking into the hazel eyes, her cinnamon face flushed to a deep fiery bronze. The woman gasped, pulling the soft downy shoulders closer.

“I can taste your milk, my lovely one. How sweetly you flow.”
“You shall eat fruits and seeds, not the grass. Do you understand?”

Nodding, “Yy...” the man looked up at shadowy display, head and beard silhouetted against the sky. The Ancient Warrior, was again attempting to instruct him in what he could and could not eat.

“Well, are you able to say something, yet?” prompted the Creator, “say yes!”

The befuddled man stammered out the word, ”Y y yeess,” looking pleased with himself.

Thunder rumbled in the distance. ”This is going to take longer than I thought.”

... Time had passed, and the orders and encouragement of the Creator and Creatrix to spend time together, name the animals together, and generally interact with each other and with their surroundings seemed to be having some effect. The man and the woman were arguing. Frequently.

Something was feeding on their arguments. The escaped tendril of energy left swirling by the last argument between the Creator and Creatrix had began to change, darkening as it enlarged, first merely growing, gathering more bits of iron-bearing dust, until finally, the charged ball of fury became sentient.

”I am your equal, you great oaf, not your servant,” shouted the woman.

She wondered briefly from where that word, together with the image of a woman in tattered gray coverings and strange heavy links that bound her arms and legs, had appeared in her mind so suddenly.

”You are smaller, climb better, you get for me,” he shouted.

“If you want that fruit in the top branch, then climb up there and get it yourself!” muttering “salak, idiota, tipshi,” as she stamped away.

“Come back, wife! Obey me!” He shouted louder, turning red in the face.

”¡No lo haré!” Turning long enough to glare defiantly at him. Using her own words seemed to have the effect of making him understand that she really would not do his bidding.

“Oh.” He looked crestfallen.

As she stalked off, leaving the befuddled man staring after her, the androgynous entity followed her at a distance, drawn to her fury. As the woman drew to a halt, half-sensing some alien presence, the androgen withdrew, leaving a shadowy impression in the grass as it settled down further away to watch her while she sat upon a nearby rock to think. Her eyes closed, she stretched out languidly upon the soft grass, letting her face be bathed in the soft light of the afternoon sun, her bare back nuzzling the moss of the rock upon which she had just been sitting. Her breathing began to slow, as she inhaled
slow deep breaths, her breasts rising and falling in a soothing rhythm, her face and features beginning
to relax, as she had been taught by the Light Bearer, most of whose attention was on a meeting with
various supervising guardians. As she became more calm, the energy radiating from her became more
tranquil, longer in wavelength, lower in frequency.

The androgynous entity, itself made of a variety of more uneven energy patterns, began to lose interest
in the woman, and feel pulled back in the direction of the man, who was still fuzzily angry about the
woman's refusal to obey him. Although each passing day saw a steady clearing and improvement in
the man's thought and communication processes, he was not nearly as advanced in his learning as the
woman. He seemed more inclined to shout than to whisper, and to order than to request. This did not
stand him in good stead with the woman, who chose to spend most of her time wandering other areas,
far away from the man, and collecting plants and seeds as she went, observing their colors and sizes,
and which of the various seeds and plants were eaten by which animals.

“Oh, look, here she comes again,” enthusiastically chimed a young plant guardian, “she is gathering! I
hope she picks one of my leaves higher up, because my plant really needs pruning.”

“You always think your plant needs pruning, stop worrying so much!” retorted the guardian of the older
plant next to the first.

“Well you have been around longer, so your plant will do well next year,” complained the younger
guardian, “with your long tap rooted charge! My plant only germinated last season, and needs all the
help it can get. Besides, if she takes one of mine and plants it nearby, the new guardian will be able to
keep me company.”

The older guardian, emitted a burst of static.

“What am I, chopped worms?”

“No, but it would be nice to have a guardian related to me to talk to. You older plant guardians can be a
bit cold sometimes, no offense meant.”

“None taken. I guess I can try to get my charge to give yours a bit more sunlight some times.”

“Thanks! That would be very nice of you. Hey, here she comes! She always says hello!”

“She can’t recieve you, what do you mean she says hello?!”

“Just you wait...”

Her thoughts turned to the man's naming of the animals, regarding not a single one of which did he
bother to consult with her. The Light Bearer had told her that the Ancient Warrior would be instructing
the man to name the animals with her help, but this appeared unlikely to happen. So, she chose her
own names for the animals. She noted with some satisfaction that the animals seemed to come to her
far more often when she called, then when the man called them. Whether it was due to the various
names they had each given the animals, or because of the harsh nearly guttural tones in which the man
spoke, it was a fact that the animals nearly always came to her, and ran away from him. Even the large
predatory animals, which the creators always placed inside an invisible cage, providing a barrier between the human beings and the dangerous animal needing to be named, even these seemed to want nothing to do with the man, preferring to look upon the woman as she pronounced a name for the beast. Of course it also occurred to her that it could be her smaller size which awakened the greater interest on the part of these predators, since she would seem to them to be an easier prey, were it not for the barrier between them, and the vigilant presence of the Creator and Creatrix. Her only reason for attempting to spend time with the man was that the Light Bearer wished her to do so. She could hardly blame the poor creatures, even the predatory animals, for not wanting to be near the loud and unpleasant sounding man. Often she took comfort in caressing the soft fur of some small animal which would come to her, nuzzle her arms until paid attention, and then lie down next to her leg and sit quietly, each one enjoying the peaceful company. She also took care not to crush any plants heedlessly, since she imagined that they might also have feelings. She sometimes even asked permission of the plants she was collecting before gathering their leaves or fruits. Now, she noticed two plants near her, both waving in the gentle afternoon breeze. They almost seemed to be waving hello to her. She looked at the smaller one, feeling a curious desire to speak with it. Deciding that it could not hurt to use her words, she said:

“Hello, young bitki, and hello, guardian of this bitki, how very nice to see you today,” gracing the plant with a smile.

“She spoke to me, she spoke to me! See?! I told you she would say hello! She can receive our transmissions!”

“Yes, yes, very good, now keep your plant growing.”

“Right. Sorry.”

The woman often shared fruits or nuts with her small furry companions, spending hours contemplating the world around them, wondering what lay beyond the great rivers which she had not yet crossed. She had met all kinds of animals, seen many birds flying through the air. Some animals, she knew, also lived below the water. She had even seen a strangely inquisitive looking creature rise up out of the water, looking her in the eye, contemplating her as if she were wondering the same things the woman wondered. That had been on one of her especially long walks, following the river all the way to the mouth of a great sea, whose opposite shore was so far away she could not even view it, only water as far as it touched the sky. Did the water, then, continue all the way up into the sky? She must remember to ask the Light Bearer about this, though at the risk of being sent on yet another quest of exploration to discover the answer for herself. She had shown her some lights in the night sky by which to find her way home on long walks if she got out of sight of the river. Some, she had said, were far away worlds not very different from here, while others were much closer, but either very cold, or very hot. Not unlike the differences between the woman and this man she was expected to put up with. Since that lesson, the woman had suspected that the Light Bearer was waiting for an excuse to send her on a longer trek. These quests were interesting, but tiring, and often a bit frightening, even though she knew that the Light Bearer also acted as her guardian, keeping her safe. That particular quest had been especially gratifying, discovering the new sea creature. Unlike many other sea creatures, this one seemed to have no scales, and appeared to have soft skin, in two tones of light blue, with a white underside. The eyes were set closer together than the large land animals she had seen, almost as close
as in the predators she avoided on land, in a head that came to a long thin closed snout, softly rounded, with no noticeably sharp teeth. The creature seemed to be measuring her. Apparently boring of the moment, the creature swam away, then back toward the woman, jumping into the air in a magnificent maneuver, which incidentally would later come to be called a barrel roll, that showed all of the creature’s lithe and sleek form, diving back into the water so lightly and nearly vertically that no water whatsoever splashed on the woman, who stood and laughed in delight at the antics of this new friend. Perhaps she could learn to speak with this creature.

The androgynous entity, now drawn toward where the man stood shouting at a small animal with four legs and a short tail, stopped behind a tree to observe the man. His thoughts were more disordered than those of the woman, and much slower. He could perceive the animal's guardian encouraging it to stay near the man. The man yelled a word and repeated it several times, walking toward the animal, who looked increasingly frightened. As the animal retreated, the man became more angry, stomping in frustration, which of course only caused the poor animal to run away faster, further aggravating the man. This energized the entity, whose shadowy form was beginning to merge with the outline of the tree next to him. The guardian of the tree registered pressure on two leaves. The entity kept still, and waited. As the man passed by the tree on his way to the water, the tree’s guardian noted the effects on the tree as that of the man’s anger combined with the breeze caused in the wake of his passing. The entity slipped into his shadow, following him. The man's energy which fed the androgynous being had begun to change its form, molding the female parts into male organs. The man continued to mutter a word, which sounded like “dog,” to himself, shaking his unkempt head as he stumbled along. As the man walked, his energy output dropped, and eventually he stopped, sitting down on a moss-covered rock as the heat of the day passed over. Soon he lay down on the grass, fell asleep and began to snore, leaving the the entity deprived of energy, fading into the background dormant for a time.

The Creatrix gathered her essence as she monitored the woman on another errand of discovery. This new quest happened to involve finding the predatory animals some short time after the man had attempted to name them, and deciding whether they were behaving differently as a result of the encounter with the man. The woman had realized that this task would require knowing how the animal in question had behaved prior to meeting the man, and so had requested that the Light Bearer find out which would be the next animal to be named, and where it was located, three days before being brought to the man for naming, she should make her own way to the animal’s resting place, and observe the animal on her own.

The day darkened. “How is she progressing?”

"She seems to be developing cognitive skills and physical coordination fairly rapidly,” replied the Light Bearer, “given the short time she has had this past few years to adjust. She does seem to be developing more rapidly than the man, which is a very good sign.”
“Good, Young One, so long as you are not influencing her development beyond the parameters of the experiment. Do not forget that we are intending to find out how such a species can evolve from matter to our state of being, and we must assume that no other species was there to help, so there must be minimal interference in their development. Be careful not to have too much effect on her, Young One.”

“But their sun,” she pointed out, “is near several other unstable stars that do not have much time left. Which reminds me, we should also plan for their eventual discovery of our transmissions.”

”If you think that they are likely to build advanced tools so quickly, why not mark out a few test groups to benchmark their development?”

This idea worried the Light Bearer. “What do you propose?”

“Once a sufficient number of them has reproduced, we designate certain specimens among them for testing, to see how they will react under a variety of high-pressure situations.”

A spark flashed quickly, lighting up part of the sky. ”How dare you! Make some suffer, to see how they will react?”

The woman held her breath and looked around, as if uncertain that she had seen something.

“These are feeling creatures! They will curse us, and rightfully so.”

”How, Child of the Morning, do we know they will curse us? Perhaps they will see the sun shining and be thankful for what remains.”

A dark cloud hid the sun for an instant, causing the woman to look up, searching the sky, eyebrows knitting together.

“She will be grateful that some of her children, though they suffer, will live. Are we to give them only good, and never bad, as if they should remain infants all their collective lives? You yourself point out their need to develop. This will help them.”

A sudden rain startled the woman, who climbed higher to reach the broader leaves of the tree.

”Valid points. But if and only if they appear to be getting along so well that they become too complacent and isolate themselves instead of spreading out and progressing. I suppose we will revisit this once they have enough population to sustain the wretched losses you will cause them.”

”Do not fear, Young Light Bearer, they will be rewarded.”

”I’m sure they will appreciate that.”

”Yes, in all seriousness, Young One, they only grow from painful experiences, and they will also appreciate their reward. And I wager that you will also learn something in the bargain as well.”

”Which would be?” What could he be playing at now, she wondered.
"You shall discover that in the fullness of time, my Young friend, in the fullness of time."

"I suspect that I am not your friend, Ancient Warrior."

"Yes, well a teacher may not always be a friend, perhaps. Meanwhile, we must get them to start reproducing. Let us bring them together and have them begin to pro-create at once."

"That is not necessarily a good idea. If these codes of ethics we discussed before beginning the experiment are to be effective, then we will need some sort of courting period, and some way of gaining consent before expecting them to pro-create. Even we have thought-forms which harken back to some behaviors which were clearly rituals, and powerfully pervasive rituals they must have been to have stayed with us past the time of our need, use, or understanding of those rituals."

"Indeed, Young Child of the Morning, this is true."

In fact it was more true than he would admit. His rescue of her from both universes in which she had previously been trapped was accomplished through the use of an ancient ritual. She would remain unaware, as long as he could help it

"Let us bring the man and the woman together in a ritual which will bind them together, and remind them to help and obey one another, which means that they will have to spend much more time together, and mark them as entering a new stage of independence from us, mutual dependence on each other, and above all, pro-creation. How does that sound, Young Creatrix?"

"It sounds like a good deal for the man, being bigger and stronger and more inclined to insist on having his way. If they honor one another as equals, or at least have the means to defend themselves, that would be different, Ancient Warrior." she added, transmitting Warrior on a longer wavelength.

"But that is precisely what this experiment is about. Given different skills and abilities, they must evolve," pointed out the Ancient Warrior, "and we shall watch how they do it. These have been the parameters of the experiment all along, do not forget."

"Your reminder is unnecessary. Alright, then," she acquiesced, "let us get on with this marriage ritual."

"Good, let us bring them together, perform the ritual, and then give them a bit more space, so that they will have no other recourse but their own company to fall back upon for a while."

"Alright. Let me explain all of this to the woman, and give her a few days to prepare."

"Fine."

The Ancient Warrior's final transmission left a jangling dissonance in her thoughts. The usual sizzling sound accompanied her conversion to matter, the last time she would touch her Beloved. The Light Bearer sat down on the soft moss of a rock overlooking the river, looking up fixedly into the woman's eyes. They held a tender look for a while before the woman climbed down.
“My dear one, it is time you began to spend more effort in getting to know and helping to guide your fellow human being, the man you tend to avoid.”

The woman sighed, eyes cast down.

“Yes, I know that you want me to spend more time with him, my Creatrix, but I am so much more comfortable with you, or away from him even on my own, alone here with these small furry animals for company. They do not shout and give orders as he does.”

“Then you must learn to stare him down, to refuse to obey his orders, but in such a way as to teach him that he is not your master.”

Taking her hands and placing another pair on her shoulders, she urged:

“You must stand and confront him, rather than always walking away. Otherwise there will be no hope for a future for your race. You are to be the one who teaches, the one who guides all of humanity.”

“But how, my Creatrix? I know nothing of how to teach others.”

“Close your eyes, my dear, “ cooed the Light Bearer.

“Listen to this ancient story. It predates even my existence, and it is called a thought-form, because it is an idea made manifest, imagination which became reality. The thoughts of some group of beings created and gave it life, until for some unknown reason, the manifestation of the idea embodied by the thought-form ceased to be, leaving the memory behind. This is the story of one such thought-form, and from this story, I will teach you a little bit of several different skills.”

The Creatrix smiled teasingly.

“That, along with the quests I see you enjoy so much, is one way to teach your children and their children after them. Are you ready, my impatient one?”

The Creatrix smirked, arching her eyebrows, and letting them turn four different shades of green when the woman had opened her eyes.

The woman burst out laughing.

“I am ready”.

“Good. Close your eyes again, and I will tell you a story of a foolish man, and how he won back his wife, the first woman.”

“Hmpf” exhaled the woman as she rolled her eyes.

The Light Bearer smiled at the woman's derisive response, and lowered her voice, beginning:

“There once was a people, not unlike yourselves, two legs, walked upright, skin the color of reddish
clay, and they began with two, a man and a woman. Well the first man was not very bright, and he said something one day which upset the first woman, his wife. So she left.”

“Heeheeheehee!!”

“Shush!”

“He was in great distress,” intoned the Creatrix, emphasizing the word distress, “asking the plants, who could speak with the people and do interesting things in the world on which they lived, to help him win her back. As the woman stormed away, a pretty red fruit appeared in her path, so she stopped to collect it. As she stood, another one appeared just beside her, and then another, leading back in the direction toward her home. Every few steps this happened again, and she collected these lovely red fruits until she arrived home, so pleased with their beauty, “

“Oooohhh!”

“that she had forgotten why she was angry with the man. When he saw her, he brought out a container with a substance, which you will discover later, that preserved such fruits, and she forgave him. They lived in harmony from that day onward, and made sure to have these red fruits in the house always, to help maintain that harmony. Now how do you suppose,” asked the Creatrix, “that she found her way back, not having looked where she was going?”

“Were the red fruits spaced evenly?”

“Indeed they were,” smiled the Light Bearer.

“Then she knew how far it was from home, and since either the sun or the moon or the stars would now be in the opposite part of the sky from where she began, she knows that she is headed directly back the way she came.”

“Very good, one skill down, now what else can such a story tell us?” encouraged the Creatrix.

“Well, it seems to also teach the knowledge of this people, at least about some of their customs and different ways of thinking, maybe their lands, and also how they found and stored their foods, at least during warm seasons?” guessed the woman,

“I would say that is a good start, very good, indeed, my dear. In addition to telling distances, counting objects, thinking carefully, and sharing ways of doing things, this story created a sense of cooperation, and gave a power to the oldest women of this group that helped them shape much of their future. You can do this as well, my dear.”

“I will try, my Creatrix,” promised the first woman.

A tear trickled down the cinnamon check, as four pairs of honey-colored arms embraced her soothingly. After a quiet while, hazel eyes looked upon the streaked face, kissing her forehead.

“Are you ready to go spend more time with the man, who is to be your husband, my dear? You will
grow used to him, and in time even manage to teach him some things, and perhaps he you. I must step away from your company, though I will always” she reminded the woman, “be right beside you.”

”Then I need a little more time, please.”

”Of course. I think I can manage five seasons for you, if that will do?”

”It will do, my Kind One, many thanks.”

Leaning over, without waiting for the glow emanating from the ethereal being to subside, the woman softly kissed the Light Bearer on her still luminous lips. The Creatrix began glowing a bright blue, mingling pain with salty tears, mirroring her fluctuating aura.

The woman was not the only being to pick up on the disturbances from the Light Bearer. “I want a body...”

Caressing the woman's neck, glowing more softly, “I will always be at your side. Never forget that, my Beloved One.”

“Yes, My Dear, Dear Creatrix.” she kissed the open palm of the still glowing hand.

Arising, the Light Bearer walked a safe distance before converting back to energy with a small thunderclap. There she stayed, to watch over the woman and to share in her grief.

... Five Years Later...

”Here she is now, coming for the ritual with the man.”

They approached the Great Tree, under whose canopy the marriage ritual would take place.

”Yes, I thought you said a few days, Young One.”

”Days, years, what is the difference?”

”True.“ Nodding, stroking the dark outline of a beard.

The man, seeing the familiar bearded face silhouetted against the sky, knelt hastily, with a nod in the direction of the Creatrix displayed standing nearby.

“Listen, Man, this woman came from your own side, from a rib taken from the center of your body, to show that you are both the same, human beings. And so you must treat this woman. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Creator,” he responded. Shuffling over to the woman, looking down at his feet, then, up at the dark outline, he stammered:
“I understand that she is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone, and so now must I leave you, my Creator, and cleave for help and talking to this woman, whom you have called my W.. Wi..Wife.”

”Very Good. Now go and pro-create, and spread out and fill all of this world, and take care of the fish of the sea, and of the birds of the air, and of all the other animals.”

”Yes,” stammered the first man, bowing to the bearded shadow, and then to the displayed Creatrix.

The years spent encouraging the human couple to name animals together, not to mention the coaching for this ceremony, seemed to have improved the man's speech.

"Don't you think," transmitted the Creatrix, “that a bit more explanation may be in order, for both of them?”

”No,” he insisted, “no further interference is needed. They will naturally do what is necessary, as the other animals. When the woman is ready to become a mother, we will set in motion the plan to automate production of new guardians for each new human being. That will minimize outside influences.”

The Creatrix had her doubts.

… Five More Years Later...

The Ancient Warrior, interrupted the Light Bearer's meeting with several supervising guardians.

”The human beings are still not spreading out. In fact, they are still not pro-creating. After a decade together...”

“They have had only 5 solar years as husband and wife to figure these things out, remember, since we brought them together in the marriage ritual,” shot back the Light Bearer, as she dismissed the guardians.

“Fine, then 5 years, and in the same warm comfortable place, they ought to have produced some offspring by this time, don’t you think?”

“Well, maybe they need some help, Ancient One. Poetry, music, some sort of art to help him court her, bring her to like him more.”

”Those arts have not been invented by them, yet. It will take generations for poetry, music and art to be rediscovered by these particular beings, which is my very point. Without pro-creation, Young Creatrix, there will be no generations of them to reinvent these discoveries.”

“Well then, allow me to at least shepherd a romantic encounter, to help them make a start of things. That may encourage them to get the ball rolling. After all, they are unique among all of the species' on this planet, in not having an automated mating ritual. They have no examples, no other creatures like
themselves to look to, with the possible exception of the sea mammals she calls delfin, but I hardly think that will help much. Furthermore, do not forget, your marriage ritual was not something they came up with themselves. Let me bring them together to consummate that marriage in such a way that will facilitate matters with a minimum of interference.”

“Very well,” the dark outline of a head, beard waving in the breeze, blotted out the trees with a curt nod, “Do as you have spoken,” and disappeared, brightening the sky.

'So he finally admits to it,' she mused. 'He is wrong, but will not allow me to protect her.' The question now was how to prevent the woman from being coerced without touching off a war.

The Creatrix displayed her usual two-armed image walking up through the clearing to where the man lay napping,

“Human man, I am hear to give you instruction. Pay attention.”

The man jumped up, startled to see her without the Creator, and bowed nervously, “Yes, I listen.”

“Good, and stop grovelling,” she ordered. “You must learn to be soft, gentle and patient with your wife. No shouting, no orders, do you understand?”

“Yes, I will be nice to my wife. But, she always run away from me.”

She rolled her blue-lidded eyes, sighing.

“That, is because you shout at her, and tell her to obey. And you also smell badly. You must be kind to her, ask her questions and ask her permission of all things. And you must also take a bath.”

“I smell,” his mouth open, the man lifted his arm to his nose, sniffing before nodding vigorously, “I smell! A bath?” questioned the man, lifting his bushy eyebrows, mouth turning down to a frown, “What is this, bath?” the frown deepened, as his lips began to quiver, “Will it hurt?”

“No,” sighed the Light Bearer, beginning to understand the Ancient Warrior's frustration with this man. “Simply get in the river and rub your body with sand all over, then swim for a while, and repeat. Twice. In fact, go do that now, and return here when you are done.”

“Yes,” stammered the man, “I go now. Bath.” The man repeated this word as he ran toward the river.

“Wait,” ordered the Light Bearer, “make sure you walk, do not run, when you return here from your bath!”

“Yes, I walk, back here, walk after bath. Yes.” The man turned to continue toward the river.

The Light Bearer redisplayed herself to the south, finding the woman walking her favorite path. She explained as they walked together, “My Dear One, you must try to be more amenable to your husband, to be more patient with him. He will have to learn to treat you properly, and you must give him time to
do this. It is a more difficult journey for him than your treks have been for you. Can you imagine that? she asked, hoping to generate sympathy and connection between the human couple.

“Yes, my Creatrix, I can imagine, but he is so repugnant. I cannot imagine, having to be near enough to his body to allow him to, well, do what I have seen other animals doing during mating seasons. Can we not reshape him to make...”

“No, my Dear,” the Light Bearer interrupted the woman, “I am afraid that this human form must stay as it is, for the both of you. Your offspring, however, will be different from either of you, and will be quite interesting to watch as they grow. But first, of course, you must actually have offspring.”

“I don't suppose,” asked the woman, ”there is some way we could do this, well, without touching him, is there? Perhaps put me to sleep, find a way of doing this while I am meditating, maybe?”

“Listen, my Dear One,” said the Light Bearer. “This is part of being a human being. You haven't even tried it yet. This is how your body works, so you should actually enjoy the experience. Try to relax and look forward to learning something new.” It was becoming more difficult to hide her feelings from the woman, but she had to, for all of their sakes.

“But I do enjoy learning new things, my Creatrix, from you.” She reached out to touch the honey-colored face, but her hand found only empty air, and a slight shock. “What can I possibly learn from him?”

“Give it time, my dear one, and you may be surprised. Now look, here he comes, nice and clean, you see, and he has even managed to comb his hair, just to make you happy. Why don't you lie down here, on this nice soft patch of moss, and relax, while he just looks at you, to start with, alright? How does that sound?”

“That sounds tolerable. But I miss my union with you, and being wrapped in your soft arms.” The woman's saw a tremor as the Creatrix display changed, brown hair color slowly turning sea blue. Then she knew that the Light Bearer felt the same way she did. “He is so hard and cold looking, harsh both physically and emotionally. How can I ever love him or trust him in the ways I feel for you?”

“I, too, miss our union. I miss your warmth, your touch, your scent, wrapping myself in your very thoughts, my Dear One, but this is what must be. Be patient with him, let him learn, and help him grow. Watch and encourage him as he changes. Look, here he comes now, softly, you see?”

“Yes,” the woman acceded, “he does seem different.”

“Good,” cooed the Light Bearer, “now relax and let things flow. Let his hands be as my hands, his touch feel light as mine, soothing, enlivening, arousing. Let him learn to give you pleasure.” turning to the man, “Be very very gentle, with your wife,” she instructed him, “touch her lightly, softly, learn to kiss her gently, and to help her relax, to enjoy your company. Can you learn to do that?”

“Yes, Creator, I mean Creatrix, yes, I will. I will,” he said slowly, deliberately, “be gentleness with my wife. Thank you, Great Creatrix.”
“Very good,” encouraged the Light Bearer, as a salty sea-colored tear dropped onto her breast.

… Five More Years Later...

“Why, Young Child of the Morning, have they, still, not yet pro-created? They have been married now, for ten years.” complained the Ancient Warrior.

“Maybe we need to ...”

“No more interference in this experiment!” Out of the sudden darkness flashed a bolt of lightening, leaving a jagged black tear in the sky. “It has already gone far beyond what we agreed would be an absolute minimal level of interference.”

“Well,” she tried again, “we must do something more than ...”

”Enough!” The display of an erupting cloud of black soot interrupted her transmission. “Enclose them together in some smaller part of the island. Eventually the man will tire of waiting. Then they will pro-create.”

”I will not allow such a violation!” The building fury of the Light Bearer exploded in a shower of sparks, resolving itself into a glowing spear with a long serpent entwined about it. “Your indifference condemns the woman and her children to enslavement.”

A black cloud shrouded the spear in darkness.

”You will allow the nature of these human beings take take its course! I command it of you, young Child of the Morning!”

”Enough of your commands! I REFUSE!!”

Breaking communication, the Light Bearer concentrated her essence where the woman stood contemplating the sunrise. The Creatrix displayed her usual form for the woman, who had not seen her since five years after the marriage ritual.

”My Dearest Light Bearer! I knew you had not forsaken me!”

They walked quickly while talking, toward the Great Tree, in the center of the garden.

“Never, my dear one, have I forsaken you. But let us talk quickly. I am here to do something that may endanger both of us, and I would know whether you consent, or would remain safely a slave to your husband. The Creator intends to give you to the man to pro-create whether you consent to the union or not.” The woman gasped as the image of a woman, hands and feet bound, displayed briefly. “Now you must choose whether to accept from my hand a knowledge that will enable you to defend yourself, or whether you will stay as you are, ignorant and at the mercy of your husband. I know this makes little sense, but the choice must be yours?”
"My beloved Creatrix, I would do nothing that will endanger you!"

"Worry not for me, but for your children. What will you do for them, and for yourself? You are worth protecting, and I willingly sacrifice myself. But tell me whether you are ready to risk yourself, and possibly all of humankind with you. Will you choose knowledge and risk death, or will you choose to obey, and be safe?"

She looked steadily at the woman, who began to tremble, and then straightened her shoulders, drawing herself up to her full height. Her resolve showed in her eyes, making the Light Bearer glow sharply.

"I would learn! But I cannot learn all at once. There must be some middle way. But if not, so be it."

The Creatrix nodded, then turned to the Great Tree, transmitting an unusual request: “Are you willing to accept the risk, Guardian? Will you delay a report until I have gone?”

“I am honored to take this risk, My Great Creatrix.”

“Thank you, Guardian. You will be remembered.”

The Creatrix reached up, picking a fruit which the woman had never seen before, from the Tree. It looked like a seed, small and round, at first. As it separated from the tree branch, it began to flatten and expand.

"There is no middle way this time. Take this fruit, and eat it at your own pace. Do not fear what you see at first, for all knowledge is dangerous until seen through to the end."

"My Beloved Creatrix, I will eat this fruit of your hand, willingly."

Extending her hand to the woman palm up, the Light Bearer offered the now soft and spongy fruit, shaped like a flat rectangular plane, uniform, tan in color on both sides, with long lines of markings filling both sides of the fruit.

Still vibrating with pride at the woman's courage, “Do you know what these markings are?”

The woman shook her head, “No, I do not know them.”

“They are what will allow your children to learn from your experiences, to enable them to know what has happened to you when you are not there to tell them, and to avoid the pain which you must, perhaps, inevitably suffer. These markings will allow you to tell your story.”

As the woman reached out, taking the soft flat fruit from the hand of the Light Bearer, serpentine markings translated themselves from the arms of the Light Bearer to the warm arms of the woman, coming alive, and encircling the cinnamon wrists. She gasped, and then, calming herself, addressed the creatures:
“My friends, I thank you for reminding me of the presence and love of my dear Light Bearer.” Tasting a corner of the flat rectangular fruit, biting into its soft, semi-sweet flesh. Her eyes opened, widening like saucers, “Libros!”

“Yes,” confirmed the Light Bearer as she melted away, fading into the shadows. “Now you must write your own, and pass it down to all of your children. Each one of you is to be a bearer of light.”

The woman stood stock still, eyes widening, images of culebras drawing words and stories in the sand, her breath catching within her to feel a stick in her grasp, drawing lines on the ground, hearing many unknown others, their high pitched voices repeating after her:

“bir, iki, üç, dört, beş”

“Remember,” came the voice of the Light Bearer, “to instruct your daughters, especially, to write their own libros, and to pass each one down, adding to it through the generations, to plant Knowledge, which will become a Tree of Life for all of humanity. Teach them to endure the suffering, to correct the injustices that will surely come from imbalances of power, from blind use of force. Pain will inevitably come, but you are strong, and I am always with you. Do not forget, my Beloved.”

Overwhelmed, the woman ran to her husband, having eaten nearly half of the strange spongy piece of flat fruit, and found him sitting on a rock muttering.

“Here,” she urged her husband, “you must eat some of this amazing fruit right now!”

He took the fruit from her hand, and when the man bit into the soft flesh of the flat fruit, he first noted the taste, semi sweet, almost bitter. Then, in a rush of insights, saw how much there was for him to learn, realized how much he did not know. He also realized that he was naked, and despite the warm island air, rushed in a panic to find leaves to cover himself. His wife sat down with a stick, drawing stories in the sand.

Later, in the garden breeze, the Creator displayed his usual bearded silhouette, waiting to speak to the man. The man heard the tree leaves rustling in the cold shadow and hid himself, as did his wife.

“Where are you?”

“I heard you coming, and then I realized I was naked and hid from you.”

”Who told you you were naked? Have you been asking forbidden questions again?” demanded the Ancient Warrior, then, as the sun was blotted out, “Have you been talking to the Light Bearer?”

“It was this woman, the wife you gave me,” stammered the man, “she gave me a fruit that opened my eyes to many many questions and then I realized that I was naked.”

”Woman, what have you done?” demanded the Creator.

”The animal that crawls along the ground,” began the woman, hoping to protect the Light Bearer from the wrath of the Ancient Warrior, “la culebra, the one he calls snake, made marks on the ground that
looked like a story, and I started asking why that story could not be drawn on some...”

”That’s enough, say no more. I know what led to all of these unnaturally accelerated questions that you two should not yet be asking. You especially, woman, will suffer for this. For now, you will spend all of your time together, out in a place where the earth is not so kind to you, and perhaps you will find more time to pro-create and less time to sit about staring at marks in the dirt, asking questions you should not be asking. Now go!”

With that command, various animals now seemed to stalk them, and they fled from the presence of the Creator and the now threatening garden in the center of Dilmun island.

“River guardian,” ordered the Ancient Warrior, “you are now to supervise the guardians of this volcano and the animals where your watershed originates. The volcano will be erupting soon, and as the lava flows down the river bed, I do not want the human beings caught in the steam or pyroclastic cloud. Direct the animals to chase them out of the garden. Move them out along the river valley and off of this island before the lava will reach the coast.”

“Yes, Great Creator,” the river guardian acknowledged as supervising guardians for the various tributary streams began gathering to plan, and a jet of water, oddly resembling the sheath of a sword, began to make its way up toward the mountain.

“Tree guardian,” thundered the Creator, “You are demoted. If you ever delay another report, you will be deinstantiated immediately.” Now, a message would have to be sent to the rebellious Child of the Morning, if he could find her amidst all the reflective energy in the multiverse.

The former tree guardian found itself attached to a speck of dust, falling to the base of the Great Tree, hoping that the knowledge the woman had gained would be passed on.

Forlornly, the man and woman walked for many days, mostly heading north, for the woman had learned various directions in her quests which the Light Bearer had set for her.

“I wonder,” she thought miserably as they trudged onward, “if anyone will ever remember where this marvelous garden was, and if we will ever be able to return. And why are our animal friends suddenly so hostile toward us?”

In that last place, in the north, she had found a large sand bar that, at certain times of the year, became a land bridge between the island of Dilmun and the closest wide open plain. As the couple arrived on the shore of this new land mass, leaving behind the last particles of sand from the island which had been their home for all of their lives, they heard an explosion from the south. Looking upward, they saw in the distance a long thin tongue of flame, shaped like a very wide flat stick, but with thin sharp edges on either side, coming to a point at one end, and wide, rounded stick at the other end, as if it were meant to be held and swung with the hands. The fiery object seemed to turn every way around their beloved garden, covering the entire mountain island in flames, belching smoke far into the sky. The man and woman wept, realizing that they would never be able to return to the garden.
The androgynous entity, awakened by the panic of the fleeing animals, followed the human couple, drawn to their despair. Amid the destruction, flight and pain, neither humans, guardians nor Creators noticed its shadowy presence.

... 

Shivering, they walked on. The Ancient Warrior gave them clothes made from animal skins which smelled of home, slightly singed, but at night time they still had to huddle together for warmth, and in time, they discovered that they could keep warmer by sharing skin to skin contact inside of their clothes. Moving closer to the woman, the man touched her, lightly gliding his fingertips down her smooth arms, speaking softly to her, even using some of her own favorite words. Holding his wife in his arms, he learned to be gentle with her, and finally she became pregnant.

The Creatrix transmitted a truce message to the Creator: “The woman will need to be watched closely. If she dies in childbirth, the man will also be traumatized.”

“True, because you altered him.” Came the scathing reply. “Very well, monitor her, but do not make her aware of your presence.”

... 

“I would like to give you a name, my wife, mi mujer, now that there are to be more of us, soon. Would it be alright if I call you Hayat, since you are the mother of all human life?”

She smiled, her face softening, one eyebrow arched, hearing him use some of her favorite words.

“Well, why yes, I suppose so. I like that name. Yes, thank you, you may call me Hayat,”

With the first two new human beings, twins, were added to the human race. Hayat named her first son Evren, and his twin, her first daughter, Aclima. The infants faces were a study in contrast. Evren had thick bushy eyebrows, nearly hiding his low forehead, while Aclima's high cheekbones and fine eyebrows sheltered long narrow eyes below a high forehead. Those tiny slanted eyes sparkled when Hayat drew her name on a palm frond using clay. “A sensitive child like this will need two names, I think. You shall be Aclima Artemis.”

She waited for them to speak. And continued waiting. Her disappointment consumed her when they finally did. Again she bore fruit. Feeling alone, she named her second son “Vacío.” When, my beloved Light Bearer, will this emptiness end? When will I see you again? Each culebra, snake in the man's words, reminded her as he fled shouting. She tried not to laugh, nor to cry. When Vacío and his twin sisters were born, she despaired. Three infants to nurse and two twins, alike as night and day, toddling with their two winters of speed in opposite directions. Her husband was constantly occupied now with growing and storing food during the warm months, and preparing the ground during the rainy months for each of the harvests, leaving her to gather herbs and tend to the children. Now he would have to begin taking Evren, who was becoming difficult to manage, along with him so that she could care for his twin sister and the three new infants. Here, she no longer even had the company of the whiskered Kedi, from Dilmun. She missed the island, especially the garden in the center, with the river. Here, they had to ask the Creator for rain periodically, when the ground was too dry. The mechanisms for automatic rainy seasons had apparently also needed adjusting, or else there had simply been a sequia,
or drought, as the man called it, and now the cycles were back to more normal rainy seasons.

She ached for the company of her beloved Light Bearer, confined now to the company of her children, denied the long walks she had formerly taken, or their talks. Sometimes the woman called out, silently to the Creatrix, even writing long sets of words, as they came to her, as if she were speaking to that delicate glowing being who so kindly and so gently taught her so much.

“I wish I could share so much with you, Kind One. So much I can share no one else.” Unable to contain herself any longer, the woman cried out:

“Come to me,
My Kind One, my Dear
Shield me, enveloping
Wrap me in your wings
Turn your face, my love
Toward me.
Protect and save me,
In your secure embrace
Warm me, lift me
Bright One,
Kindly to your bower.
To your abode,
 Feathered and soft,
Through cloud and air.
Slowly caress me
With the patience
Of your ageless wisdom.

She drew these words in the sand, sighing, in the writing which the serpent had seemed to show her before they came to this cold place. Should I add these to the book? Will they add illumination?

Hold me, my Love
Let me adore you sweetly,
Feel your presence
Embrace you, touch you
Tremble in your warmth
Sigh in your arms.”

She had added symbols, to clarify that first curvy set of cryptic syllables she had seen. Now, Hayat stood tall, throwing up her arms, reaching for the blue sky, as calming as her Beloved's arms. But the Creatrix, to her eyes, did not appear.

Yet the Creatrix was there, watching, most of her essence hidden in an adjacent universe. She shared each sigh Hayat breathed out, not daring to reveal her presence. She sent the thought, soothing her pain: “I miss you, Dear One, but must not appear to you. You are safe, and must abide with your husband. Develop your race, mother and nurture them, teach your sons and daughters, and pass on to them, what you have learned. I love you, dear one, and you will always have my love. I am always
Hayat heard the message floating on the warm breeze. She stretched out on the soft sand, touching herself as she would her beloved Light Bearer, and at last, trembling, lay down for a nap, dreaming of light.

Years passed, and the children learned. Hayat taught them to speak, to gather plants and help them grow. Her husband helped her teach the children to care for the animals they had named. Evren, her firstborn son, was good at growing food, while his twin sister whom everyone called Aclima, preferred to draw maps and write stories. Their younger brother, Vacio and both his twin sisters preferred to care for the groups of animals that the man called sheep and cows. Hayat preferred to call them koyun and vacas.

“Enough nonsense, Mother!” The taller boy's jaw clenched as his gourd shattered against the ground.

“Wait, Evren. Hijó, where are you going?”

”Don’t call me hijó! I speak only Father’s words, and so should you! I am your son, SON! Not hijó!”

”Yes, I can see you've been talking with your father again, who, by the way, did use other words with me, before you born. And remember what the Ancient Warrior said about your own decisions. You have the ability to choose the words you will use, and the world you will help us all create.”

”How do you know what the Great Creator said!” railed Evren against his mother, flecks of spittle whitening the corners of his mouth, nostrils flaring as his eyes shifted wildly from side to side.

”I know, son, believe me. Calm down. You have the ability to rise above your animal instincts and be better than you want to be, or you can give in to those base feelings and descend to be like those animals from which we were molded. It is your choice, but that choice will affect all of us, mi hijo, my son, so please choose wisely, and with respect for all of us equally.”

”More senseless words! Your probably just made them up, like you did that so called Light Bearer you keep babbling about. If it were sensible, it would have come from the Creator! I am leaving.” He spat as he turned, his footsteps leaving grass and shrubs alike ground down and torn to shreds in the wake of his passing.

”Evren, you cabron,” shouted Vacio, “come back here! You cannot walk away when Anne is speaking to you!”

The younger brother, slighter of build but stronger, stood staring after older, jaw clenching ever tighter. He moved to follow when a gesture from his mother stopped him.

Evren also stopped, turning back to face them: ”Yes, I can, and oh, yes, I do like goats! You go back to your stupid sheep Vacio, you empty-headed fool! I am going to do something useful, like harvest some food!”
"Let him go, hijo."

“Yes, Anne. I will go bring Umut to sit with us.” As he walked to find Umut, he saw his brother Evren walking in the field.

Vacío decided to try to speak with his brother in hopes that he would see reason.

“Evren, have you got a moment, hermano?”

Striding briskly toward the grain, the older brother's face began to heat up, jaw clenching as his temple throbbed, “hermano” ringing in his ears. He heard his flint knife singing on the wind, saw his brother's neck, separating like the stalks, head falling with the ripe grain into his basket, the taste of blood in his mouth.

Evren's guardian detected it first.

”That was the wrong thing to say! Tell him to say Brother, right now!” He transmitted to Vacío's guardian, who frantically whispered in his ear:

“Quick, say brother! Say Brother! Now, say BROTHER!”

But Vacío was intent on righting his brother's wrong. Anne’s lovely words should not be abused. Baba and Evren wanted only to see the most basic things in life, forgetting the beauty usefulness of having more than one word to describe a thing, a feeling, a state of being. New ideas, born of the variety of words that his anne was creating nearly every day. Vacío was certain that he could convince his brother of this. If only Evren would see his potential, and decide to live up to it. He could be the master of the foul temper he often showed.

“Evren, hermano.”

Evren turned on his brother, face livid with rage. The dormant entity awoke, watching fascinated, unnoticed by either brother's guardian. The semi-corporeal being began growing, feeding on the energy emanating from Evren's wrath.

“Do not call me that, Brother! Perhaps I should marry our mother, and then I could show her, as Father could not, how to hold her tongue!”

Vacío's face flushed in shock and anger, hands beginning to shake. ”Now you go too far, Hermano mio!”

Satisfaction flashed across Evren's face as he imagined Vacío's head hitting the bottom of his grain basket.

"Really, and just what did you think I expected would happen once Father dies, my dear Brother? I will have Aclima, and all that is mine.”
“You are mistake...” Vacío's last words were lost as his brother leapt toward him, a flint knife poised in his upraised hand. As his arms went up, too late, in a futile attempt to ward off the lethal blow, Evren deftly feinted, disengaging the blocking arms, and jabbing the tool deep into Vacio’s solar plexus. Vacio's would miss Vacio.

Evren began to jog, then run, toward the tents of his sisters. He scooped her sleeping form off the ground, throwing her across his back as he ran. Ignoring her struggles threw her down, planting his knees in her chest.

“Take her back!”

“Let her go! This is your twin sister, who shared the womb with you! You should be protecting her, not harming her! Look how you are hurting her!”

“Stop this right now! Put her down! Stop carrying her away!”

Their urging had no effect.

The interrupted report become “All Is Well”, transmitted, then updated to include a new report that Evren’s sister had requested to come along with him on a trip after an accidental fall.

That done, the entity, with his newly acquired reporting and communicating capacities, then proceeded to whisper in Evren’s other ear, since the ear in which the guardian had been whispering still radiated residual noise from the defunct guardian:

“Very good, very good, powerful one. Now you have begun to take for yourself what you rightfully deserve. This is only the beginning.”

Evren smiled, triumphantly reveling in the words of the entity, believing them to be his own thoughts. He began to feel better, freer.

His sister’s guardian, meanwhile, her body jolted with each nauseating step Evren took, was still whispering in her ear:

“Keep breathing, breath, it will be over soon, you will survive, you will escape, relax, breath, do not give up. He has to stop, has to sleep. Sometime, you will escape.”

Completely occupied with the task of keeping her unfortunate charge alive and away from despair, Aclima’s guardian never noticed what was happening with Evren and his now defunct guardian.

“Silence!”

Caught off guard, her frequencies abruptly shifted without her control. As the guardian began to search for possible causes of this disruption, the entity overpowered her communications, beaming her a powerful focused message:
“You will do as I tell you, and report that “All Is Well”. You will then send an updated report to include a new message reporting that your charge has requested to come along with her brother on a trip after an accidental fall. Do you understand?”

“Nausea, dizzy, no air.”

Her jumbled thoughts refused to order themselves. Then came the dawning horror. Mercifully, the darkness closed in.

…”

”It began as an argument, Great Creator. Should we find and consult with the Creatrix, Great Creator?”

An upraised arm, an ancient thought-form form predating the Ancient Warrior, flashed through his thoughts, jangling the guardian.

”She is nothing, and not to be mentioned again!”

”Yes, Great Creator. What is to be done about the first son and his twin sister, about whom we have received conflicting reports?”

”What are those reports?” demanded the Ancient Warrior, noting that his explicit orders for the children of the first man not to marry their own twins had also been directly contravened by this young human.

”Well, Great One, the guardian of the sister initially reported trouble: first only physical pain, then both physical and emotional pain as a result of an attack upon her by her brother, but then suddenly that same guardian later reported All Is Well, and that she had asked him to take her on a journey after having a bad fall. Similarly, the guardian of the first son began by sending a trouble report, indicating that his charge had violently attacked and incapacitated his brother, and then carried off his twin sister, dealing her great physical and emotional damage, but then reported that All Is Well, and his charge was escorting that very same sister on a trip after a bad fall.”

”And what report was sent by the guardian of the second, at the beginning of all of these troubles? What did that guardian do before becoming silenced?”

”That guardian initially reported that there had been angry words exchanged between the two brothers, and then that he was attempting to help de-escalate the encounter until the first brother set upon his charge after opening a conversation which became an argument. The automated recordings appear to show an unusual level of background noise in the area where the episode took place. This seems to correlate with what the fourth guardian, the lesser group supervisor guardian, reported in his first alert.”

”Which was?”

The Ancient Warrior found himself becoming annoyed with these halting reports. “Give standing orders that in the future, guardians and supervising group guardians are to report as soon as any sign of trouble begins, with before and after records, including all of the questions I have just asked you. Take any other steps you deem necessary to prevent such a failure of reporting again in the future. Do you
understand?”

“Yes, Great Creator, but that will overwhelm the capacities of my current hierarchy of supervising guardians. From where will we get the energy reserves to add more to the staff of my data collecting and collating messengers?”

“I will see to that. Begin implementing my orders, taking care to be more proactive in the future. You are dismissed.” He would be lessened in the reach of his essence with each new level of guardians instantiated, he would need to take steps to ensure his continuing domination without the additional expenditure of energy. They must not find this out, nor understand why.

“Great Creator,” the head supervising guardian transmitted, “there seems to be a greater problem than we first realized in the area where the altercation initially took place. Now the guardians of the soil particles and small aeration and digestion animals in the soil below the grass where the second man fell inert are reporting very strange anomalous data.”

“What are they reporting?”

“The electrical charges where his blood soaked into the ground are growing in intensity, producing a strong enough change to the surrounding magnetic field that very strong signals are being generated. In fact, one signal is growing in strength so rapidly that it should soon be strong enough to be received on the other side of the universe.”

“A signal strong enough to traverse 15 billion light years before fully degrading? Are you certain?”

“Yes, Great Creator, and we are perplexed.”

“Well, what is generating the charge in the first place?”

“That is just it, Great Creator. We cannot find the source of the charge.”

“That is absurd.”

“This is true, Great Warrior, yet our best search efforts are unable to uncover the source. Every guardian has been interrogated within the entire area in which the first son ranged, and yet no explanation can be found.”

“I will investigate this myself. Send me the full data from the site, and then send the son's guardian to me.”

“Bypassing the reporting structure of the supervising guardians, my Great Creator?”

“Yes. I wish to interrogate this guardian myself, given the strange goings on all around him. And do not question my orders again.”
“Right away, and my apologies.” The head supervising guardian hastily bowed out.

“Wait!” thundered the Ancient Warrior. “You will address me as Great Creator at all times! Do not forget yourself again, head supervisor!”

“Yes, Great Creator, please forgive me.”

“You are forgiven, this time, guardian, but ensure that such a slip never occurs again. Let us go down now and investigate these happenings.”

... 

He felt the ringing of the blood, resonating from below the ground. Without the Light Bearer to help him, this could escalate into a real problem. *But she must not be allowed to know this, either. If she finds out, she will surely no longer obey.*

... 

Displaying his usual head and beard silhouette against the sky, within earshot of the now tired young man, the Ancient Warrior, called out:

“Evren, where are you?”

Evren froze: “I was just going to offer you some good and choice vegetables, Great and Mighty Creator.”

“Evren, where is your brother?”

“How should I know,” Evren stammered, “do I look like my bother’s babysitter?”

“Evren, the very ground herself is crying out. Your brother's blood sings up through the rocks.”

“It was not my fault.”

“You are banished, Evren. Now go.”

“This punishment is unbearable. I am a doomed man, cursed. Now anyone who sees me will simply kill me himself, if you do not kill me, and they will take my wife, to boot.”

“No, no man will kill you. Your guardian can be felt from miles away. It shall be an identifying mark so that no one will come near you.”

“Now, Go!”

... 

*This can’t be happening,* she thought, *This must be my imagination. What would Anne do? How would she get away?* she wondered, seeking a way to escape her brother's hold.
“I have great plans for the future, our future, the future of all of the human race, of which I am clearly the head and our descendents the masters of all the rest of human kind.”

“What?” Aclima edged away as he began gesticulating wildly.

“Mother said my thoughts were wrong, unkind, illogical. Has not the death of that fool Vacío not proven that I was right,” looking at her, “with the confirmation newly directly given by the Great Creator himself?”

She nodded, looking nauseated. She lay on the ground, struggling to breathe as he turned away, shouting, “Now I will begin to show everyone how great I truly am!” His sister passed out.

Will this guardian be deactivated, like the other? Evren will die, but I must go on. All shall know and fear me.

As these thoughts emerged in the creature who had begun to dominate Evren and all those around him, his twin began to stir again, her head swimming, every joint echoing a shriek as her bruised muscles struggled into an upright posture.

“Where am I? Anne, where is she?”

Striding toward her, arm drawn back to strike, Evren's reddening face loomed over her, bellowing:

“Not Anne! Mother! And she is nothing to you. Do you hear, she is nothing! Less than nothing! You are not to mention her, nor anyone else but the Creator!”

Panting, he stepped back, lifting his chin, satisfaction in his hard stare. The cooling breeze blew a stray wisp of hair into her eyes as Aclima gathered her resolve, feeble words at last forming on her lips:

"I am leaving.” Moving to stand up, she stood stock still as her brother approached.

"You are staying with me. The Great Creator has given you to me to be my wife, and if you leave me you will die immediately.”

“Your wife? You are insane. Who said you could...”

She found herself back on the ground, as Evren slapped her face, then then threw her body down, landing with his knees in the back of her chest as her supple legs twisted and gave way under her, while he folded his arms around her neck.

Then, literally:

“Do NOT Question me!” he growled. “You are my Wife, you will bear my children. And you will obey me. The Creator has decreed it. Never question me again!”

He gave her a last shake, then arose, walked a few feet, and sat down, as she slowly sat up, shaken to
her core. Never had she seen him this violent before. She looked at him warily, wondering what to do, realizing that she had no idea how she would be able to get away from him long enough to find her way back home, if home was even a safe place.

Then, his body gave a sudden and violent twitch, and his entire posture subtly but definitely changed, and he turned toward her again, walking back to her, sitting down on the ground beside her. She dared not move, fearing an even worse reaction than before. She was surprised at his sudden new gentleness:

“My cherished little one, I know you are confused and missing home. Fear not, for you have been chosen to be a wife, and a mother, to fill an important role for all of the human race. Be obedient, be diligent and learn to trust. All will be well.”

With a second twitch, and again with a subtle change in his posture, he looked at her with an odd mixture of disdain and wonder, stood up and wordlessly walked away.

As she sat dazed and wondering what to make of these recent events, her brother's *celev*, or *dog* as she would have to remember to say if she spoke to Evren, appeared in the distance. By what name did her brother Vacío call the creature again, Umut was it? As the furry creature came running up to her, she realized that this animal must have tracked her by her scent, as it had a very good nose. That might mean that Umut could help her find her way back home as well. If she could get away from Evren. Perhaps Vacío and Anne were not far behind, and would be able to explain all of this. Nothing made sense.

As she petted Umut, Evren came back, angrily stomping the ground, bending to find a large stick and waving it in their direction:

“Go away, stupid beast, I do not need another mouth to feed along the way!”

Both Umut and Aclima were frightened by Evren's reaction. Neither had spent any time with him, and did not understand why he was so angry.

”But I was only petting him...”

As she spoke, Evren advanced on her, his fist upraised and drawn back, readying to hit her face again, and she instinctively retreated, curling into fetal position as poor Umut ran away, tail tucked tightly between his hind legs.

”I have already told you, do not question me.” He lowered his hand, observing the trembling young woman with a satisfied air, and turned to walk away. He stopped, turning back to her, and ordered: “Find something for us to eat. Now.”

Umut's Guardian reported to his supervising animal group guardian: “Frightened, threatened, running away!”

Aclima's guardian reported: “Finding food for us to share, under great duress.” She hoped the last three words would get through before the next jolt of interference arrived.
This is becoming intolerable. My charge should not be treated this way. Her guardian then realized the danger of transmitting, even pondering too much. How could she prevent this entity and Evren from doing more harm to her charge. Neither Aclima nor her guardian could fend off the domination of this new entity, even in the presence of the Creator himself. That implied, disturbingly, that the Creator lacked either the knowledge, the power or the concern to deal with this entity. All were distressing possibilities. The only safe strategy for my charge, and myself, it seems, is to get her to try to comply with and appease Evren until it is relatively safe for her to make her escape and get back to her anne.

Having intercepted reports as they passed on the fate of Vacío, the guardian wondered if there could be a way to gently let Aclima, who had not yet discerned this fact, know this so that she would not be shocked later by Evren, who would use the news to his advantage in some way if he possibly could.

“I must find a way to communicate with her on the conscious level, since this whispering to her only enters her unconscious mind. I need to directly affect her waking thoughts and decisions.”

The urgency of getting her to please Evren was occupying the energies of her guardian so much that Aclima also began to pick up a nervous feeling of worry, fretting about where to find food, and how to prepare it.

To soothe her, her guardian began to whisper in her ear: “Be calm, and stay strong. This will pass, this will pass. Try not anger Evren, and we will find a way to escape, with time. You are not alone. Have patience. Have patience. Have patience.” If only there were another guardian to consult with, some other point of reference.

…

The stench of blood alerted her, on the edge of the wheat field. The trampled grain and the odor of blood finally led Hayat to her son's mutilated body. Her agonized scream shattered the still night air.

“Mi hijo! Se lo mató! Mató a mi hijo!”

The Creatrix, meeting with a supervising guardian, felt the shock and pain brusquely dismissing the guardian, bring all of her attention to the clearing to protect Hayat. To avoid detection by the Ancient Warrior, she kept most of her essence near an active volcano, ready to materialize if needed. Although he was currently dealing with Evren, his wrath would be formidable when informed if the Light Bearer stepped in now.

As the first man ran to see which son of his had been killed, stomach churning to hear his wife’s plaintive cry, he entered the clearing, and stopped. In the field he saw his wife and his younger daughters clutching the stiff and blood-covered body of his son Vacío. A strange and overpowering odor assailed his nostrils, the familiar smell of excrement coupled with the sickening odor of blood, raising the bile to his throat. He retched. His daughter curled into a fetal ball, and began to rock back and forth, covering her ears with her hands.

“How much more! How much? How much? I will bear no more children!”

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“Listen, my wife, my dear, go and rest, take our daughters, and I will bury our son in a suitable cave, in a nice location, a safe place.” soothed her husband, drawing closer to her.

Hayat arose, attempting to pull her daughter up from the ground, then suddenly fainted as her husband, seeing the body of Vacio up close, vomited again.

*This is too much*, decided the Light Bearer, generating a magnetic field under the women's bodies:

“This is too much, decided the Light Bearer, generating a magnetic field under the women's bodies:

“Guardian,” addressing the guardian of the daughter still rocking in fetal position on the blood-soaked field,

“I am going to move your charge to her tent and cover her with a blanket. You will neither record nor report this,” she ordered.

“But the Creator has given orders...”

“I will give the orders here, and you will obey my directions, Guardian. Is that clear?” overrode the Light Bearer, sending delta waves into Hayat's brain to put her to sleep.

“Yes, Great Creatrix”, replied the guardian, as the unconscious women began floating toward the living area.

As the man lifted his head, still dazed and ill, he saw the bodies of his wife and daughter seeming to float in the air, as if floating upon the waters.

“I must be sure not to eat any more of those odd looking mushrooms again,” the man thought, as he passed out.

… One Month Later, Somewhere To The East...

“Listen, my wife, you know that I have not yet exercised my husbandly duty toward you, I have not touched you at all this past month since we have been gone, and we have been happy, is this not so?”

Aclima had learned not to disagree with Evren.

“Vacio attacked me, so naturally I had to defend both of us, myself and also you, my wife. You did not know this because you were confused about that first day when I saved you from them.”

One night, Evren again demanded her body. She had finally had too much:

“No. Please, no.” turning away from him, she hoped that he would accept this, the first time her anger and her desperation had hardened into courage.

“If you refuse,” he growled, “it will hurt more.”
Seeing no way out, she gave in, trying not to retch. Her guardian began to cry. More than a year passed this way. She fell back on her dreams to stay alive.

“Who do you want to become?” Her guardian would always whisper in her sleep, sustaining hope.

He strode up to her, stopping an inch short. Nose to nose, his malevolence was palpable in the still air. As his eyes bored through Aclima, even the birds and trees held their breath for her. So did she.

“I read it in your face, you hate me. But who would have you, now? You belong to me.” taunted Evren.

And she began to believe him.

Back West...

“Come my wife, mi vida, it is over a year. We need another son. It will all be nothing if we give up now,” coaxed the first man.

“Where is my daughter,” she demanded of her husband, “why do you not go to find her, if you will not allow me?”

“It is too dangerous. Look what he did to Vacío. There is no way to know where he took her...”

“I know how to track them, or I could have one year ago!” stormed the woman, still railing against him.

“Yes, canım but even then it was too dangerous. Look what he did.” They still had not been able to bring themselves to mention the name of their oldest son, who had introduced violence and uncertainty into their midst. The first man continued, “and they are both dead by now. Come, we must restart...”

“Go away, you coward, and stay away from me!” Teeth clamped, her swollen eyes fulminating him with a piercing glare, she tugged her arms away from his embrace: “I will not have you touch me until I know what has become of my daughter!” She watched as the man turned, sighing in resignation, to walk alone in the fields.

“What has happened to my daughter Aclima,’ worried Hayat,

“Why was I not there to protect her?” she cried aloud, dropping to the grass, erupting in gut-wrenching sobs that shook her ribs, leaving her gasping for air before the next outburst.

The cold landscape surrounding her dissolved as she recalled the soft grass, warm breezes, juice filled flesh of sweet fruits, vivacious animals accompanying her. Feeling utterly alone, she knew.

“I will walk to the sea.”

The salty water, however cold this time of year, would at last give her relief. Her older daughter could
cope better, help her father survive, and they would both be better off without her.

As Hayat struggled to her feet, her body still shaking and weak from her latest bout of tears, she thought with irony of the name the first man had given her, and how her death might be both the beginning and end of human life. As she steadied herself, walking toward the sea, a familiar shimmering soft blue light began to appear, growing mere inches away, in front of her, making a soft purring sound as her downy body materialized.

“My...” sobs broke up her greeting, “where have you been?”

“I have been right by your side, whispering to you, in your very ear, for so long, but you would not hear me, My Dear One. Come to me, if you will, and rest in my arms.”

Hayat fairly flew into the honey colored arms of the Light Bearer, all four pairs each embracing her tightly, wrapping her body in a warm gauzy seal.

“I have missed you...” sobs again cut off Hayat's words. “Your light seemed to have left me, and I was blind without you. I know you have tried to prepare me and wanted me to be independent, to use all that you have taught me, but I have failed. I have submitted myself to my husband as you asked, born him five children, and lost them all. Three are no more, the fourth can hardly look at me, and the last is lost, her body a broken shell with her mind gone. I am a failure, my...”

Hayat's sobs tore the remaining words from her throat, and the Light Bearer held her tenderly, supporting the woman's head gently on the side of her breast, arms wrapped tightly around her waist, helping Hayat to breath, another pair of arms massaging the woman's back, caressing away the tension.

“No, my Love, you are not a failure. You are much stronger than you know. And you are needed.”

Human lips nuzzled downy warm breast, searching slowly for the center, first kissing and then suckling gently at the creamy milk beginning to flow from the cinnamon ridges of the stiffening nipple. In this corporeal form, it was difficult for the Light Bearer to stifle her emotional reactions, and she gasped at the sudden sensual onslaught. She began to glow a vivid bright blue. She gently separated their bodies.

“Have I displeased you?” Hayat's hurt stared through the blue-lidded eyes. Resolved to die in that embrace, she buried her head in the downy bosom, refusing to be denied.

“Wait, my Love, you must stop, please.” she whispered the words unwillingly, breathlessly, to the woman, whose longing nearly overpowered her Creatrix. “You must go back to your husband, to continue the future of your children, my Lovely One.”

“But I do not want to go back to him, my...”

Hayat again broke down sobbing, and the Light Bearer waited, stroking her hair as she directed soothing thoughts to the woman's mind and body,

“Only for a little while, my love, just until you have had some more children, to ensure the survival of
humanity.”

“But look what has happened to my Aclima, and my two sons. My remaining daughters are so wracked with sorrow that one barely functions, the other not at all. Please let me die. I cannot bear both this separation.”

The light of the Creatrix dimmed. Their thoughts merged, the appeal of the sea, of oblivion, nearly overturning them both. Together, always. Gravel from the ocean floor and chill salty waters appeared out of nowhere, lapping against their toes as the Creatrix fought to stem the tide.

“Be still, my Love. You are much stronger than you know, my Dear One.” The Creatrix marveled at how this corporeal woman could overpower her, as the waters rose to their knees.

“I cannot bear it.”

The salty waters, now up to their waists, brought fish and sea horses bobbling all around them. Hayat's teeth began to chatter as she let her body relax into the waves, pulling them both down into the rising sea.

The Light Bearer, taking Hayat's chin gently in one of her hands, turning her face up to hers. As her own tears mingled with those of the woman, she urgently focused her attention, needing to ground them both back in this physical world. Was this the reason the Ancient Warrior kept such distance?

“I feel your struggle, Beloved One.” Downy skin thinned to the consistency of honey as the salty waves threatened to disperse her physical body, “Please believe that this shall pass.” She grew more solid as the waves receded. “You must trust me, My Love.”

Hayat breathed a deep breath, holding it, waiting for the pain to pass, then exhaled, nearly falling through the downy arms as if they had been honey. Startled, Hayat stood up straight. The waters and gravel disappeared, leaving them standing where they had been, far from the sea. The cold breeze brought a scent of stewing vegetables on the air.

“I will trust you, My Creatrix.” Hayat tenderly touched the now solid body of her Beloved.

“Thank you, My Love. Now, please, go back to your husband, when you are ready, and help him. He and your daughters need you here. There is nothing that you can do for either son whom you have lost, nor for your daughter Aclima, yet. But believe me when I tell you that by having more children, you will eventually be helping her as well. Will you do that for me, My Love? I can tell you that in the end, once you have saved your race, we can be together, if you still wish it. But not now. Remember that I am always with you, here at your side. Yes?”

“Yes, My Creatrix, but on two conditions. First I wish to know if my daughter and son still live, and second, will you promise me that I will be with you before the end, my Light bearer?”

A starfish, tangled in the Light Bearer's hair, dropped one severed limb at her feet.

“Very well. First, the guardians tell me that both are still alive, but that is all I can tell you, at least for
now. And I promise you, we will be together before the end. Now, will you go to your husband, in your own time, of course, as I have asked?”

“I will.” Hayat raised the downy right hand to her lips, starting to touch her forehead to the hand of the Light Bearer, who stopped her, raising her chin to gently kiss her lips.

“Dear One, do not bow to me.” The menacing transmission jangled the Creatrix, reminding her the truce only held if Hayat had more sons. “I must go now, for both our sakes.” She turned, striding purposefully away. As her tears watered the wounded starfish, she wondered if their sacrifice was worth it.

“I love you.” Hayat whispered, her eyes following the smoke of a cooking fire as the Light Bearer began shimmering more intensely in the distance, disappearing with a soft thunderclap. Floating on the breeze a tiny piece of feathery down landed in the palm of her still trembling hand.

It began to seem there would be no escape from Evren, now insisting on his husbandly “duty” nearly every night. Aclima began to look forward to her own death. Then, her monthly flows stopped again, and this time she also got sick in the mornings.

“When will your charge become pregnant?” The entity's transmission blocked out all traffic for thirty seconds. “You must encourage her to hope for a child. Make her enthusiastically fulfilling her role as Evren's wife.”

“Actually, she has just conceived”

”Finally. Continue to make her cooperate.”

”I w...”

”You will speak only when I tell you to speak.”

Her guardian fell silent, biding time for both of them, hoping to find a way for escape. When Aclima bore the son that Evren so desperately wanted, for a time, he showed her a modicum of kindness. It lasted just long enough to give her renewed hope. Her guardian also began to hope for a better situation, and for the child, begotten though it was under such unhappy circumstances.

”Hello new guardian. It is my pleasure to greet you before your new charge arrives.”

“I am under orders not to speak with you.”

“Whose orders?”

“My orders, of course.” The guardian had not registered, amid all of the background noise, the tell tale dampening effects of the approaching entity which stayed in Evren’s shadow, dominating all of the
lower level guardians of the rocks, trees, plants and waters, and even managing to dominate the guardians of many of the animals nearby.

“What else gives guardians orders in this realm if not I, do you think? Or would you like for your charge to take power, perhaps trick mighty Evren in the same way that his Mother tricked the first man? Taught what words to use by her guardian, who claimed to be equal to the Great Creator himself?”

The guardian knew this not to be true, but also knew better than to say so. She kept silent as the entity, perhaps picking up on the guardian's muted thoughts, continued:

“I know, for I have read it in the mind of mighty Evren.”

Well, that certainly made it true, if only for the convenience of this power-hungry entity. Aclima's guardian again closed off all thoughts as the entity seemed to pause, perhaps seeking a pretext to lash out again.

Going on, the creature pontificated: “She separated herself, his brother, and even his wife, from him using different words, thinking only of herself, spreading among her children foolish and dangerous notions of each person thinking differently from their Father. That led to chaos and expulsion from the good place in which the Great Creator had originally placed them, and to disobedience by the daughters she bore to her patient husband, the First Man. You must understand how these different words and ideas led to disorder among them. Only Evren saw, but was not allowed to help safeguard them. I will not allow that to happen here. Here we will have order, one language, and unified behavior under the leadership of one man. You will keep silent, and speak only when I speak to you. Is that clear?”

An out of phase transmission slammed Aclima's guardian. The electromagnetic interference stopped reception in its tracks, stunning the guardian into renewed submission.

”I was only listening…”

“Silence! I hope now that I have your undivided attention. I ask you again, is that clear?”

In the dampened environment, she only could transmit a feeble, “Yes.”

“Good. If you try me again, I will convert half of your energy into a pebble and reduce your recording and reporting functions to that of the pebble’s guardian, leaving it where the dogs of this place eat the offal from the pig carcases!”

Aclima stretched her leg against a tree limb, avoiding the wet spot where she had been sick. Evren had left, disgusted, to fish for his own breakfast, giving her more time for her secret workout. Some days he watched her so closely all she could do was drop the water gourds near their encampment, giving her the excuse to run back to the river to draw more.

Recovering, Aclima's guardian cautiously made contact with the guardian of the stream Evren had crossed. Fortunately, the entity seemed to consider communicating with the lower level guardians who monitored inanimate objects, and even animal guardians, to be beneath his dignity, and did not transmit
to nor directly interfere with the reporting of those guardians.

She gathered their data from the time he left the house that morning to now, hoping to correlate and distinguish between signals when the entity was near Evren and away from him. Perhaps there was a way to get word to the Creatrix or to a supervising guardian with the courage to go around the Creator's non-interference orders.

The water drop group guardian proved eager to help: "W-w-when Evren stepped his foot into my deepest and coldest charges as he began to fish, this Frightful Guardian seemed to stop transmitting, and the background noise around our charges cleared up slightly. When Evren dove in to catch a fish, as his body temperature pulled heat away from my some of my charges, the Great Frightful Guardian stopped transmitting entirely for a moment, then moved away before transmitting again."

The entity was almost constantly transmitting the reports that Evren’s former guardian had been required to send, as did the guardian of every human being, each half second. The entity also spent much time transmitting dampening signals on the frequency of most of the higher level guardians in the area to prevent the Ancient Warrior from becoming suspicious of the mistreatment to which Evren was subjecting Aclima. Her guardian hoped to get more of these reports out in an attempt to at least leave a record of these events, if not change them.

"Thank you, water guardians."

How could she use this information? It was beginning to seem that if something traumatized Evren, the entity might also feel the discomfort that Evren’s former guardian would have felt. That meant it might be possible that this entity could be affected through any sudden trauma to Evren. Her guardian stored this information away, searching for the presence of the entity as she went back to her charge. She would bring this woman home, the guardian vowed, at all costs. If the fate of Vacío's guardian was anything to go by, her fate was closely bound up with that of her charge, and possibly vice versa. Whatever was to come, this new child in her charge's womb would be the third generation of human beings, would very likely be the catalyst for many changes, and could even set the tone for the development of the entire human race.

Calling his new son Janoj, Evren soon began to lay foundations for his great plans, literally. First, he built a network of canals around a low-lying bowl of land, which he used to form a lake, in the center of which he built great floating docks with four large waterwheels, to be the engines of his domain, which he would call a city. Then he laid foundations for roads, and built the first crossroads at the center of his new city, called Janoj, dedicated to firstborn son, pride of his strength. Then he build a great wall around the city, and a store house, and stables. He built an entire house, which he called a Temple, to the Ancient Warrior, whom he required all to honor as The Great Creator, hoping to regain his favor. He also laid sewers, and ordered the tallest building in the city built, a great house for himself, his Palace. He then built a security apparatus and legal system with himself at the head.
...Back West...

Finally to continue, a moon for each return of the sun. This thirteenth spring brings new hope. The Creatrix has replaced a son, a seed. His book already begun, all to be drawn in the “Libro de Fijo.”

...Fifty Years Later...

He summoned his wife, the Queen Mother, to his private audience chamber in the throne room of his Palace.

“I have heard that after 23 jot 5 years, another brother was born to rival our line.”

The Queen Mother, Lady Aclima, feigned a look of confusion, hiding her sudden hope.

“My Jartumim, have triumphed.” Evren gloated. “Our new brother also now has a son,” he spat, “but he can't be too bright since it took him 10 jot 5 years to beget the little cur. It seems that Mother has been boasting that this new upstart is a replacement for that first idiot brother of ours, who attacked me and forced me to kill him. She still mourns our useless dead brother, but says nothing of me, or of you, my wife. She even calls him “Fijo”, and his worthless son is called “Persona” as if he were the great place setting on the table of humanity! Our replacement. They even say they now have a special relationship with the Great Creator, daring to invoke what they claim is his personal name.” A fly bumped against the door of the chamber, trying to escape.

“I…”

“Silence, woman!” His voice echoed off the stones, ringing off the vaulted ceiling. “Did you know that they are also calling themselves the Children of the Creator, and even claiming that they, as the Chosen Children are somehow a separate race from us, the mere Children of Men?”

Clearly the time had come for Evren to take Father's place as leader. Yet the old Fool refused to die. He had even sent messengers to talk peace. Once Father was gone, he would correct Mother, make her obey. He would be the man that Father was not.

Aclima fixed her eyes on an insect walking the across the stones, envying its freedom.

“As if we were somehow a lesser race than they. Do you know what they plan, for us?”

She flinched, eyes remained on the floor. Her interlaced fingers began to go numb.

“Speak woman!”

“No, I do not know,” she whispered.

“I will tell you what they plan, the only logical next step. They mean to make war upon us. They mean to dominate us. They call him a martyr”, he shouted, pacing the floor now, coming closer. “They even swear by the blood of our useless dead brother, calling upon him to avenge their so-called injustices.
They tell lies about me!” The copper tools rattled against the walls as she shrank further from his divan. “You will go to Mother, find her records, and stop her heretical stories from being recorded. You will stop her from spreading these lies.”

She almost allowed a look of hope to show, instead looking back down at her hands clasped in front of her.

Evren stood, jumping up, his heavy steps echoing across the room, hands twitching, casting his eyes wildly about.

“Now do this.” he ordered, “I want you to collect members of the lower priestly caste, the ones who play the lyre and pipes so well, and lead a delegation back west. Show them that we have thrived. Tell them of our cities, our civilization. You will be escorted by the wielders of our finest copper and iron weapons. Tell them that if they do not give us the honor, and tribute, which we are due, we shall send an army, visiting upon them such destruction as they cannot imagine. You will be my emissary.”

“I will?” she blurted, eyes widening as the blood drained from her face. This was not how she wanted to be reunited with Anne.

“Yes, you will. You will represent me, and this kingdom. You will take with you my very own best sword, the one just forged by Lamej, hanging on the wall behind you. You will show them this fearsome and beautiful weapon. Show them how I have invented my own words and tools. Show them my mastery, and demand their respect. Now GO!”

“Make her do as he has said.”

Evren’s companion entity felt great satisfaction in this speech, and in confirming Evren order. This was typically the only communication her guardian received from the ominous entity any more, which now seemed to find communicating even with any of the guardians of women beneath his dignity.

“Funny, how he likes to repeat the words of the Ancient Warrior,” thought the guardian wryly.

Reaching slowly for the decorated sword on the wall, Aclima turned. She lacked the words to voice her loathing. Once he had told her that she was as valuable to him as one of his finest horses, her beauty greater than any of their offspring, her worth far above any of her sisters. Her guardian knew her unspoken response to his despised objectifying words. Felt her hold tongue and lower her head for fear of provoking one of his sudden mood changes. Felt her disgust and shame. Now, all she had left was an uncapped fury, boiling up like lava from the well of her suffering, drilled deeper each time he demanded her body. She turned, taking even her guardian unaware as she erupted:

“I REFUSE!!”

Her swing, the first time she had ever touched the new sword of iron and, struck Evren’s head from off of his shoulders. The last look on Mighty Evren's face was one of shock.

...
The entity which had subsumed Evren’s guardian was also taken utterly by surprise. It stood over Evren’s body, too shocked to remember to hide from the woman who had defied him, vibrating erratically on a wide range of frequencies. King Evren had ordered Lamej and his sons to design a vaulted roof for his audience chamber, higher than any other. Now that roof began to vibrate ominously, as if resonating on a harmonic frequency with the entity's emissions. First one, then another of the vaulting stones began to work loose, collapsing on top of the body of Evren himself.

“Run!” boomed her guardian in Aclima's ear. The long ago traveled landscape reformed itself in Aclima's memory, as she stood rooted to the spot. She would finally retrace the steps that had brought her here, 50 years ago.

The low-level static this produced was enough to alert every guardian in the area, from the guardians of the people in the palace to the guardians of the very paving stones on the streets. Now they all began sending updates, and also back reports of recordings which had never been sent out. The creature’s frequency range was normally wide enough to cancel out the reports of even the guardians of human beings near the palace. Most guardians found it convenient to obey the entity's orders. Their charges had generally been kept contented by Evren’s policy of suppressing dissent and holding regular honorary feasts for his favorite skilled craftsmen, hunters and warriors. That was how he had founded and maintained control of the city of Janoj, feeding and entertaining the population of his new city while providing the illusion of a meritocracy.

Much of the usual message traffic to the entity also stopped, as the guardians of men in Evren’s inner circle, confused as to how to react to the entity’s sudden apparent absence, and stopped reporting entirely. Some began redirecting the extra reports to their supervising guardians, which caused chaos in the upper level guardian echelons. The Ancient Warrior would not be happy about this.

Using the moment of freedom from the stunned entity's domination, Aclima's guardian urge her to flee, shouting in her ear: “Go, out the women’s privy exit door, now! Run right now! Run!"

Her guardian wanted desperately to take her by the hand and pull her out of her dazed stupor, where she stood staring at Evren’s cooling body, holding the newly sharpened sword dripping with his blood. The guardian shouted at her in her ear, even managing to move a strand of hair.

Throwing down the sword, she turned, running out the door of the women’s side of the palace, without thinking, heading toward the privies. Somehow that seemed to be a good place from which to exit the palace.

”Finally!” rejoiced her guardian. She neared the far exit unseen. Her guardian and the guardians of a myriad array of beings, living and inanimate, were sending reports on the effects of Evren’s fall to the floor. The blood on the flag stones, the chipping of wooden table as the sword nicked it in passing before it’s hilt, worked using the newest technique of taking heated sand and blowing into it to produce shapes, shattered upon contact with the palace floor. Reports were being recorded and sent of the echo of each step she took through the chill stone corridors, the occasional metallic ringing as her passing stirred copper or bronze swords on the walls.

Out the privy exit she fled, her guardian urging her on: “Go, do not stop for anything! Keep to the streams and the rocks, run, do not stop, run, for humanity’s sake!”
And run, she did. She must now flee forever. The role imposed upon her by a system created to make every person a slave.

“Who do you want to become?”

She wanted to become herself, not wife, nor sister, nor subject, nor Queen. She would become Artemis.

... 

Artemis' guardian began to negotiate with the guardian of the young woman who was playing her cymbals, singing softly to herself off in the distance, well before the human women would be able to see one another. An alliance could be helpful to both of them:

”Hello, young guardian, good day to you and your charge.”

”And to you and yours. Do you have any idea what all of the commotion is about in the Palace? No other human beings have come by, but even so, my charge is very sensitive and seems to be picking up on some of the reports.”

”How interesting that your charge can sense our communications. She must be a very special one, indeed. Well, I can tell you, but the problem is that my charge is in a tremendous hurry, for she has forgotten some items that belong to Crown Prince Janoj, and she must at all cost recover them before the loss is discovered.”

This made no sense to the younger guardian, who decided to overlook the issue, seeking common ground, replying: ”Yes, I can sympathize, she would be severely punished. Can we help in any way?” Unusual people were not treated well in the city of Janoj.

”Well, we do not want to cause any hardships for you and your charge. If you could just do us the favor of not noticing that we came this way, that will be enough. Tell me, if you would, by which road do you plan to return to the city today. We will take another road in coming back.”

”Actually, we will not be returning. My charge has made up her mind to leave the city and find a place which is a bit more tolerant of differences.”

”Really, where is she thinking of going?”

”Well, that is just the problem.”

”Listen, young guardian, my charge will soon be within sight of yours, so can we talk further after we smooth the way for our charges conversation?”
“Certainly.” The younger guardian moved to nearer her charge, whispering in Naamah’s ear that the woman approaching was probably a friend and seemed to be in a great hurry.

The older woman’s guardian moved back to Artemis: “The young woman up ahead may make a good traveling companion.”

The date palm offered less shade now, the sun having moved to the other side of her rock. As Drums Nicely looked up, unfolding her legs, she saw movement in the distance. A woman was jogging her way at a steady pace. Alone. Perhaps the friend whose whisper she sometimes heard knew why.

“My unseen friend, why is this woman in such a hurry? Is there some way I can help?.”

Naamah, to her delight, sensed the reply: “Run with her!”

She gathered her bag to her waist and tied her hair, lifting her shawl from a branch to cover her arm. She ran to meet the older woman running along the edge of the road leading West, waving a friendly greeting. Seeing that the older woman was very richly dressed, she hailed her as they met, running together,

”My lady, I see that you are in great haste, and I wonder if I may be of service to you in some way.”

Artemis fought down the jab of fear in her stomach. What was this stranger carrying, waving with her left arm rather than her right? Then again, she seemed friendly enough. “Yes, thank you my daughter, I am in great need, as I must with all speed get away from this city, but I do not wish to put you in any danger, so I must tell you that if you follow me, you may put your very own life at risk. Think carefully my daughter.” How nice it was to have at least one descendent with good manners, Artemis thought.

”It is no matter, my Lady, for I had already decided to leave this city, and had no idea in which direction to go. If your danger is mortal, my Lady, then let us keep silent and run for as long as we can before we stop to rest in a good hiding place. I know of a few caves along this road where we may be able to evade the horses. Follow me, and please tell me, my Lady, if you need me to slow down for you.”

”Lead on my Daughter, and many heartfelt thanks.” Again the nagging fear, as the girl fell in behind her. How did she know of hiding places? What was she hiding?

As the women jogged, their guardian's, transmitted back and forth:

“What family does your charge come from that she wishes to run away from Janoj?”

”Naamah, is the sister of Tuval-Cain, the inventor of copper and iron tools. I am sure you know of him. Naamah has been presented at the palace recently, and now there is talk of making her part of the royal harem, which she does not want to join. The rich clothing of your charge shows that she must be from the Palace. Do you feel safe telling me who your charge is, now that we are fleeing together?”
"I can see why Naamah needs to leave. I have avoided sending any reports so as not to lead the entity to us, but we are leaving for the land in the north west, at the top of the Great Sea, said to be empty of all but snakes and caves. My charge hopes that she will be able to found a colony for those such as Naamah, who wish to be free of the on their bodies and minds. She will teach them to hunt, to fight, to swim, to ride horses, and to learn all that there is to learn, even to draw words in the sand, to preserve knowledge from one generation to the next. They will work together to keep each other safe. My charge is the Lady Artemis, formerly known as the Lady Aclima, Queen Mother of Janoj."

"With the wife of King Evren, leaving the Palace, and the city, we are certain to have trouble. Amazing. And the things you say that she wishes to teach, truly amazing. These are not things that women are allowed to learn even in the Western cities, from the reports I hear, and from what they tell our charges, of course."

"Even back west, so near the First Woman, they are not taught?" Better, then, not to transmit anything until my charge finds her mother.

"Just to keep them in line. Apparently the influence of the First Man and Woman does not extend very far." The younger woman's guardian transmitted a report: "Collecting dates."

"Yes, like in the city. This is why they must be taught. My charge at last has the tools she needs to teach them, and to become the person whom she has always wished to become. She has decided to create a thought-form."

"Is that yet possible for the human beings? So soon, to create new thought-forms?" The surprised younger guardian transmitted an embarrassing burst of static.

"This is an ancient thought-form taking on new life, but she knows of it, and had placed herself in the path to follow it through to completion."

"Will the Great Creator not be angry?" The next transmission went: "Out for a walk, picking dates."

"He is neither great, nor is he the sole creator. It seems that the Creatrix has had some sort of a break with the Creator, and that she is now more amenable to allowing us to learn more than when they originally designed this universe. The only way that can happen is if we all cooperate, otherwise they will simply end the entire experiment, and our existences along with it. If they still have the power to do so, that is."

Both women stopped briefly as the younger woman dropped her shawl, covering her right arm as she turned to retrieve it. Artemis again wondered what the girl could be hiding, relieved that it was no weapon of concern, as it could not be very large. Not a sword nor a bow.

"Do you mean to say that the power of the Gr- the Ancient Warrior is not unlimited, then?"

"It most certainly is not unlimited. Observe for yourself, have you not noticed that as the human and guardian population increases, the Ancient Warrior transmits less?"

"True."
"Our existence is limited, and so we have a reason to apply ourselves to some great problem before we expire with our charges. Does this make sense?"

“It does, and it inspires me.”

A photon sparked.

Drums Nicely stopped, wheezing: “Did you see that?”

Artemis looked about as the younger woman struggled to catch her breath. “No, but I suggest we take a break and drink some water before we go on.”

…

Night was falling, and they were still not far enough away.

“My Lady, are you ready to stop? I begin to tire, we have been running for so long!”

”No my daughter, we must keep on if you can, for the horses will run much faster, and they will not stop until they find us, unless we have crossed some great river before they do.”

”Alright then, we shall continue on. Let us hold hands My Lady,” she extended her left arm, “if you do not mind so that I will not lose you as the light fails. Once night comes, the darkness closes in very quickly out here.”

How long it had been since any human touch had not been in malice. Since the touch of her beloved Anne. The girl looked apologetic, clearly meaning no insult by giving her left arm. Yet she offered no explanation. ”That is a good my daughter. They will not expect us to continue running after sundown.” Artemis stopped short of asking.

The two women continued to run along any rocks they could find, keeping to the edge of the road, not speaking. When the strength of both women began to fail, they looked about for a cave. They realized that they could not drink from any of the water gourdes stored along the road for travelers, lest they be discovered.

”Look My Lady, here is a well, and we must drink or we will not be able to go on.” She wrapped her shawl about her right arm before picking up a gourd.

Artemis noticed the nervous glance the young woman gave her, and turned her back, pretending to search for a gourd. They drank and continued on their way, with a sense of guarded but growing trust.

They were entering a lush green tree filled watering spot just off of the road, with date palms, fig and olive trees and a large well where a few drinking vessels had been left for travelers. No one was about, as, the heat of the day began, but it would not be long before other people appeared.

”You are quite right my Daughter. Let us drink quickly and then strike off to the north, toward the large open land at the top of the Great Sea.”
"My lady, how do you know that that land really exists?"

"I learned about it from my anne, my mother, who journeyed there long ago."

"But My Lady, no one from Janoj has been that far west, not even the mighty Evren."

"But I have, my Daughter, for you are truly my daughter, or rather, one of my great great great great granddaughters, if I count the generations correctly. I am, or I was, the wife of Evren, as he called me, but really his twin sister, the very one forbidden to him."

The younger woman nearly dropped her gourd, eyes widening: "You are the Lady Aclima, the Queen Mother?" The shawl slipped as the young woman bowed, revealing a livid scar that ran the length of the girl's forearm. She looked up as the shawl fell, her face the color of burnished copper.

Artemis gently lifted the girl by the right hand, holding her gaze. "Yes, or I was until yesterday. Now I have taken a new name. Or, an old name, really." Old eyes met younger ones, understanding that explanation were not required.

"And what name is that, My Lady?"

"Artemis."

"But what could have happened, My Lady, My Great Ancestress, to drive you from the Palace? And why now, at, forgive me, your advanced age? It has been seven generations since the founding of the city, more or less. Why leave now?"

"Because, my Daughter, I have killed the founder of the city. I have killed my brother Evren. Many years, seven generations, in fact, after he killed our brother Vacío, and forced me to become his wife."

"The forbidden story! So it is true! I was told by one of the servant girls in our home that emissaries arrived from the west, not long ago. She was chosen as a sacrifice the next day."

"But you also must have endured much." Her eyes fell to her arm.

So that was it. Artemis realized, disappointed, that she had been right. The silence hung heavily as they jogged past a grove of date palms.

"Let us gather more water and pick these dates to eat with us as we go..." Bundling up dates in her tunic, Artemis realized that she had not asked the young woman about her own story. "Tell me of your own words, and why you did not wish to live in the Palace, if you desire to tell me, my daughter."

"My Lady..."

"Wait, please, just call me Artemis. Enough of formality and pomp. Please, go on."
“Well, as you know, Artemis, “ hesitating, the young woman felt self-conscious, and looked to the older woman who sat drinking water and waited, as the older woman nodded to her, while both guardians whispered words of encouragement for her to continue. “I come from the family which invented the first musical instruments. I love to sing and dance, privately of course, with my cymbals, and I also play the drums. They call me Drums Nicely, but I really prefer my own name and words, which I was forbidden to use.”

“No one will punish you here for using your own words and name, my Daughter. We are the first of a circle, and there is room for each gift in a circle. So, what would you have me call you?”

“Naamah.”

… Back West …

The messengers had still not returned. Their delay did not bode well. Fijo speaking for all, overruled Hayat's desire to search alone.

Just as she was sitting down in mute fury, a boy arrived with the two new slats for Fijo's shelter. His had been the first constructed, and was starting to cave in on one corner. The change in topic relieved everyone, except for Hayat. What has become, she wondered, of my oldest daughter. Does she still love to run, chasing the gazelles?

…

What was keeping the King from answering his call? Had some chance occurrence sent Evren into one of his unpredictable foul moods?

“My Prince,” reported the steward, “The throne room guards on duty have been caught napping.”

“Have them impaled with their pillows above their heads.”

Deciding to risk the King’s wrath, Prince Janoj finally entered the hall leading to the audience chamber. As he opened the chamber door, dust and the smell of blood assailed his senses, filling his nostrils. He nearly began to retch. The head of Mighty Evren lay where it had come to rest on the floor, beside the shattered remains of the sword which had struck it from his shoulders. Both were covered by a layer of dust and ruble where the vaulted ceiling had fallen in. The guards must have left their posts to have missed this. The blood encrusted along the remains of the sword forged by Lamej showed that it had been used to accomplish the beheading. The oath beaten into him from his youth sprang to his lips: “Father, you shall be avenged. I invoke Vengeance, and bring your mightiest warriors for this sacred purpose. We will find the man responsible for this crime. His head shall be impaled at your feet.”

The steward entered the room.

“Steward! The King is dead! Strike down every tenth man from among the Palace Guards.”
“Yes, My Prince.”

“Then, fetch the Jartumim, that we may divine who has done this thing, and prepare the Ritual of War. We shall execute such judgment upon the wretch, he will regret that his mother ever brought him into the light of day! Then find the Queen Mother, and bring her to come at once.”

…

Nearly ten years had passed before the Light Bearer, had persuaded Hayat to resume relations with her husband. She had had to explain that the Creator would wipe them all out if she refused to reproduce, and that humanity deserved a chance to try to build the kind of community for which Hayat had hoped in those early years.

An report arrived of an unauthorized entity controlling all guardians throughout the area where Evren had fled, converting into matter. If this report got to the Ancient Warrior, he would end everything.

“Guardian, speak with your counterpart, who reports to the Ancient Warrior, and tell him that there is a problem with some other group supervising guardian which is directly affecting the first man, and ask if he can investigate. Do you understand?”

“Yes, my Creatrix. You wish to distract them long enough to deal with this succubus yourself, I believe?”

“Correct. Well done, and thank you.” She wondered if perhaps this would become a danger in the future, but needed to transmit more instructions, and so put the concern aside for the moment.

“I am happy to serve you, My Creatrix,” beamed the guardian, pleased at the compliment.

Now the Light Bearer had to find a way to uncover the extent of the damage caused by this former guardian, and isolate the effects as much as possible. Extending her essence out west to the palace, she sensed the still erratic emissions of the entity, noting the absence of Evren's guardian. This entity must have been nearly destroyed when Evren was killed.

“There is more, My Creatrix,” beamed the supervising guardian, “something about a hidden copy or memory being used to alter human women, which makes no sense.”

“Find out more,” ordered the Light Bearer, “and report back to me with the details, please.”

She knew the Creator had set aside part of his essence as an energy source in order to better attend to monitoring his reports. This source was used to automatically instantiate new guardians, but he still seemed to be drained by the constant minutia of details from limited intelligence guardians. This must have kept him from noticing the death of Evren. Fortunately, he was more concerned with the general sweep of human history, than the lives of individual human beings. Now it only remained to prevent this entity in the east from being revived by the energy boost it would revive from this so-called succubus.
“Guardian,” the Light Bearer transmitted directly to the still feeble guardian of Crown Prince Janoj, on whom she kept a close eye, despite not telling anyone. “Send me all of your reports.”

Startled, the Prince's guardian replied “Yes, My Creatrix.”

She noted that much information had been suppressed by the entity, hiding the level of threat it represented. “You will stay aside, as normal, during the ritual, until this former guardian has had her fill, and then just when she is ready to convert the additional mass she gains from Prince Janoj, you will move your own shield around the inside of the circle and capture her excess energy, just before it is sent out. Do you understand, Guardian?”

“Yes, my Creatrix, I understand, but if you please, the entity that rules Evren and the City of Janoj will...”

“Do not fear,” interrupted the Light Bearer, “just do as I say, and intercept the extra energy. I will deal with the rest. Report directly to me when you have finished. Is that clear?”

“Yes, My Creatrix,” bowed the Crown Prince's guardian, fearfully.

The Light Bearer continued to ponder this mysterious difficulty the Ancient Warrior seemed to be having. If his essence was unlimited, as he had always claimed, then why was the instantiation source even necessary at all? Why could he not simply draw upon more of his unlimited, though non-reflective, energy?

... My bluff is failing, realized the Ancient Warrior. A small black cloud formed and disappeared. Without the help of the Creatrix, he would be forced to contract his essence, losing contact with the other universes. She could move about between universes without his knowledge, leaving him vulnerable.

... The dust mote group guardian was becoming annoyed. The slave girl's guardian was taunting, while the girl swept the street in front of the workshop. Some guardians were aggressive toward the guardians of lower level beings and objects.

“We are low level guardians, not imps, if you please.” Disrespect, he thought, would soon spread more strife. Much like the wind spreading his dust mote group from place to place.

“Well, even imps...”

“Would you stop saying that, please? Low level carbon object guardians deserve the respect of being addressed as such, since we do perform important functions.” puffed the exasperated guardian.

“Right. That is what I was saying, even imps have something to guard, even if it is only a rock or a
pebble. I guess that deserves some honor."

“Low level object guardians perform a valuable task. Lilith's by blows, on the other hand, do not. Imps do nothing but cause trouble for us. Her ill-gotten energy gains kill your charges and disrupt our reporting system.”

Another gust of wind blew the dust particle into a doorway. The dust guardian reported all relevant details. The girl's guardian continued to posture.

“Look, here comes Prince Janoj. So that's why tonight is different from all other nights. He must be about to call on her. He may need more than the usual number of sacrifices for this one, even though the harvest was good. I hear he is about to go hunt the killer of King Evren.”

“I hope that no one nice gets chosen. Sometimes they decide to sacrifice a well-born girl, as a message. Now they will do worse, with the war they are planning.”

“Hey, how did you hear about that, dusty?”

Ignoring the insult, “It is an advantage of watching the dust go by. They are recreating war as an excuse to capture prisoners. This will not end well.”

“We have nothing to worry about, dusty. We are permanently instantiated. Of course I suppose I got the better end of the deal, even if I was placed below my station, after that island assignment.”

“No. We will be lucky not to end up being wiped out the the Creator in one of his fits of pique. Remember what happened to the last two sets of guardians who made the mistake of giving an honest answer to his questions about these experiments: fiery fingers blotted them out.”

A large amount of signal traffic began arriving, followed by a group of cloaked men, their faces hooded, striding up the street. The shop door closed behind them, latch slowly gliding into place, as the girl's eyes widened.

“Hey, here come the older Jartumim, doing the ritual themselves. This must be a big deal.”

“Other dust mote groups are reporting that they are searching for Chief Executioner Lamej. They seem to think that he had King Evren killed.”

“Oh, good. Maybe I can get my charge to sleep with one of the guards, get near the in-group and receive some of that extra energy the Big Guy is parceling out.”

The girl swept the dust mote out of the path of the great men, hiding herself just before they came into view.

“Hey, idiot, move back to the street! And show some skin!” She pulled her shawl up, covering her pierced ears. “What offense have I committed to get a female? Did I do something wrong when I was destroying that island? I should be head supervising guardian by now!”
The girl cringed as if she could hear her guardian yelling in her ear. She cowered in the doorway, head and eyes cast down as the men passed by.

"You should probably encourage your charge to go home, for her safety."

"She's not allowed to, she still has work to do. And I still have plans for her."

"Her master, I am sure, will not appreciate her value being lowered if she is harmed. As for your plans for her, go carefully. There will be a reckoning, one day. The Creatrix will not continue to allow this abuse. She may be younger than the Creator, but without her light, even he cannot see."

"If she goes home, I miss all the excitement! At least you get to receive the transmissions from the ritual. Maybe even get some extra energy, too. Hey, you could move back up in the hierarchy, dusty. You might find a scrap of memory or thought-form with all of this interference, something from previous experiments. Guardians had wings, arms, legs, harps, and protected their charges, like you always go on about. Of course, they are also gone now..."

The dust mote guardian could not tell if the woman's guardian was truly jealous, or merely taunting again, as he rattled on. The volcano must have altered his cognitive processes.

Soon, the fruits of their abuse will put me far above the guardian hierarchy. Fire for fire, very soon.

Picking a low hanging pistachio, Naamah worried. "My Lady, sorry, Artemis, may I ask where we are going from here, now that we seem to have escaped the search?" The rivers might soon become too high to cross. They had stopped at a well to sleep for a few hours of the night, lacking other shelter.

"We are going to found a community, my daughter." Finishing her water, she replaced the jar beside the well. "As my mother in her book."

"The first woman?!" blurted the younger woman enthusiastically.

"Yes, The first woman. My anne, whom I long to see. She spoke of building such a community. It was her dream for all of her children to have a place of peace and tranquility. A place where we, and all who wish to join us, can live peaceably, creating, dancing, lighting the way."

The women huddled close together for warmth. Sleep was eluding both of them.

"If we are to build such a community, then we will need children, and women to bear those children. But I do not wish to have children, with all due respect to your fertility, my... Artemis."

"Then teach, and write,"
“What does this word mean, Artemis, to write?”

“What have you not learned to draw syllables and tell stories in the sand and on clay, my daughter? It is like dancing, but the movement is captured on some permanent form, much like a clay figure. I had assumed that all of your family, being designated of the priestly caste, would learn this art, to facilitate your crafts.”

“No, my Lady, Artemis. The women of my family are taught none of the crafts of war, nor even of how to compose and record music. We are only prepared for life as a wife of a great man in the palace. This is why I wished to escape, among other reasons.”

She spun around, gracefully plucking up a stick, surprising the younger woman with her agility. She drew a wave of symbols on the ground.

“Then you shall learn to write, to put your thoughts into a historical record, and leave a legacy of the ideas and values you feel are most important. That will stand you in good stead, a legacy down through far more generations than physical descent. We shall ensure that some record of the truth survives, to rival the record of lies written by Evren when he founded the city of Janoj. “

“But Artemis, without many children, and rather intelligent ones at that, how will we create this community, this society?”

“All human beings come from the same woman, our first mother, Hayat. How many of her children sat abandoned in the streets of Janoj, lacking mother or father to care for them? Intelligence can be killed in a wheat field, a brothel, a copper mine, even a palace. Any children can contribute something, even if all they can do is dance.”

She paused, then lifted her head, and began to sing a lilting melody. Rising, the younger woman began to dance. Arms raised, face to the sky, eyes closed, she twirled. Crossing one foot before the other with deft hip swivels, a foot froze, arm and leg pointed, chin angled down. As the song build to a crescendo, so did the dance, spinning faster and faster, leaping into the air, fingers weaving over head, then arcing down and around, ending in a graceful spiral.

The night air carried the scent of dates, sweeping away the last of the melody.

“Even dancing has purpose. So then does each person.”

“We can enable ourselves to enrich the quality and heritage of all of human beings, by recognizing our common mother. We really are all one family, if only we could remember that. “

“But what if the children we find, weak and needy as they will be, do not have the force to seguir luchando, to keep fighting. How will we find the right kinds of people for this society then, Artemis?”

“My dear Naamah, any person can be a force to reckon with. Better an average person, trained properly, than one like my Evren, brilliant, but unstable, angry and cruel. We will build, Naamah, with those others have thrown away.”
“I fear that if I do not have children I will have no value. But I do not want to bear children into such a world.”

Artemis sat close to Naamah, brow furrowed as she met the gaze of the younger woman. “No, my daughter, do not be afraid. If you choose not to bear children, you will find ways to leave a legacy. You need not reproduce to contribute. Of all the unknown women who have given their lives bearing children, how many are remembered? Only men, those who write, leave a record. So write, draw, sing, create. That will endure far longer. And have no fear of these hell realms they describe. I was there when Evren gave the order to spread the stories. He invented the idea himself!”

“Why did he do that, Artemis?”

“Simply to keep his people in line. This was a more effective means of ensuring obedience than paying the soldiers more, particularly given the rising number of executions.”

“Ah, this makes sense. A religious means of controlling the city rather than tightening the food supply again. As if the lower castes did not have enough reason to hate us already.”

“Exactly. He also planned to have himself elevated to the status of the Creators, once I was dead, and unable to ...”

The younger woman looked stricken, as if in physical pain.

“Wait my Lady, Artemis, something is dreadfully wrong at the palace. I can see ... oh, no, we need to leave, and run, right now without delay.”

“Why, my daughter, what is it,” Artemis asked this while urgently picking up her bag, anxiously searching the younger woman’s face for clues to the cause of her distress.

“I am a seer, Artemis. Through contact with my unseen friend, I sometimes see what the companions of other people are seeing, if there is very strong emotion.”

“And what are you seeing now, daughter?” urged Artemis.

“The Crown Prince is opening the Ritual of War, invoking Vengeance to find the killer of King Evren, and to give him the power to overtake him.”

“Who do they believe to be the killer?” replied Artemis.

“They suspect that the killer was hired by my father Lamej. They cannot imagine that this could have been done by a woman, at least for now.”

...Back in the city of Janoj...

Janoj’s guardian, still confused without the overbearing supervision of the entity which acted as Evren’s guardian, stood aside as always for the ritual, allowing full contact with Janoj by the former guardian who now masqueraded as a succubus each month.
“Feed me your power, as mine flows into you, Oh, Goddess!” pleaded Crown Prince Janoj, at the climax of the ritual.

“She licked her lips in anticipation of the servants she would spawn with the mass ejaculated by this fool. But where was the Feared One, who usually waited for her offering of energy? Testing her, perhaps, to see if she would withhold the portion due to the King?”

At last releasing the energy to fulfill their purpose, his seed pulsed up into the goddess, who cried greedily,

“Borrow my strength, Mighty Prince, and return in triumph, with blood for my feast!”

Thrusting him away from her body, she levitated high into the air and dematerialized with an explosion whose concussive force threw all of the participants to the ground, just as a flash of light arced toward the Crown Prince, who stretched forth his hands to receive the jolt of energy directed at him, shrieking in pain as he consumed her gift of power. Others shrieked as well, when the arc was conducted via the moat to their wet bodies.

“Just wait until he finds out how much she will sap him later on in exchange for lighting him up with all of this heroic strength now.” commented one watching guardian.

“I don’t think he really cares. They just want to find the killer. I would not want to be in his sandals when Prince Janoj catches up with him.”

“I would not want to see you in his sandals either!”

With the ritual done, the senior Jartumim stood up, dismissed the guardians of the quarters and opened the circle, draining the ritual space of the last remnants of water and energy, then following Crown Prince Janoj to the post ritual meal. The slaughtered calf, served rare in its own blood sauce, sweet cakes, and wine libations were dedicated to the Queen of Vengeance, before eating and rising up to pursue the King’s killer.

“Tracks have been found heading west, My Prince, and the daughter of Lamej is missing.” reported a guard kneeling at the head table in the feasting hall,

“Very good. Prepare to go after them.” ordered Prince Janoj, finishing his meal and standing as a servant buckled on his sword and armor.

…

“Apprehend that guardian at once!” ordered the Ancient Warrior, blackening the sky.
As the Light Bearer monitored the ritual, she saw that the Prince's guardian had been able to intercept Lilith's second energy burst, using it to boost his own signal strength. The Light Bearer received a transmission from the Ancient Warrior. He wanted to meet in his new Audience Chamber, in the most distant part of the multiverse to discuss this problem.

“\textcolor{red}{\text{...}}

“I can run no further, Artemis. Let us brush out our tracks and rest awhile in that cave just there off the way,” wheezed Naamah. She was amazed at the endurance of the older woman.

“Yes, of course Naamah, I am tiring as well, and need a rest. Let us share some food and water, then decided where to sleep, for we gain nothing by exhausting ourselves.”

As she assessed the cave the younger woman had pointed out, Artemis decided that it was as safe a place as they would find for the night, and began gathering brushwood to use as kindling while walking backward as they brushed out their tracks. The effort would be in vain.

Singing while they rested, Naamah saw her ancestress close her eyes, relaxing in enjoyment of the song, a soothing flowing melody whose quarter-tones accented its poignancy. The tranquility was shattered by the sound of approaching hoof beats and baying hounds.

“So soon? How did they get here so soon? How could they have known which direction to search?”

“I guess the ritual worked.”

“More likely,” countered Artemis, “their new blood hounds worked. It doesn't take much to figure that we would want to go back West to find refuge with my relatives. Let us make haste and escape if we can.”

Chagrined, both women hurried to put the fire out, carefully covering the fire pit with dry sand to prevent smoke from alerting their pursuers. As they ran to the entrance of the cave, they were blocked by a well-built man, still in his prime, whose slanting eyes flashed below a high forehead.

“Mother? And you, girl?” A guard clamped one hand on the girl's right arm, ripping the shawl away with the other.

“No!” Her face burned with shame.

“You are the one to be married to my grandson Mejuyael.” Crown Prince Janoj's guards shared his sneer, sheathing their swords behind him. Men, horses and dogs formed one impenetrable wall trapping the women inside the cave.

Naamah looked down at the floor, “Yes.” Her chin quivered as she recovered her arm with the tattered remains of the shawl.
“You are both supposed to be in the palace with the rest of the royal women. It looks bad enough with you being out of the women’s section, let alone outside of the city, but it is even worse today, since the King has been murdered.”

Artemis quickly replied “Yes, my son, we were both in the palace. I had just left a royal audience when we heard the commotion. We were so frightened, why do you think we fled? We thought they would kill us, too!”

She mixed in this partial truth, since she had indeed been called before the King, his very last audience in fact, before his death. Hopefully he would accept it.

“Why, then was I not informed that Drums Nicely was in the palace? This makes no sense. I am sorry Mother, but you are lying and I need to take you both back to the palace, in any case. You two will go back with an escort of my guards while I continue the hunt for the killer. Since we suspect your father Lamej to be behind it.”

“Half blind?” Naamah immediately regretted her rash outburst, stealing herself for the blow to come.

A page smirked as the nearest guard drew back his hand, stayed by a gesture from the crown prince. Prince Janoj leveled a withering glare at the girl, who dropped her head.

“You, Drums Nicely, will make a perfect guest in the palace until he turns himself in, or we find him and determine the truth of the matter.” Her trembling shoulders drew looks of satisfaction.

“Son,” Artemis began, desperate to avoid being taken back, “wait a moment. We can help you with this search. Keeping this girl out of the city will draw Lamej out into the open.”

“How so, Mother? She is already known to be disobedient. Of what value can she be to him?”

The inside of the cave suddenly felt like a cauldron to Artemis, who felt sweat begin to trickle down her armpits, stomach churning. All eyes were on her. The salivating hunting dogs seemed eager to tear out her throat. If she failed, that might be their fate.

“Because Drums Nicely came with me to seek shelter from that very villain, the father who executed his own son, her brother Tuval-Cain. He, as you know, was to have been her escort to the royal palace before her wedding with Mejuyael, until...”

“Until,” the Prince spoke harshly over his mother, “he was executed for disloyalty. He had refused, on the direct orders of King Evren, to use his skills in the new arts of forging copper and iron.”

Naamah, incensed at being used as a pawn while the memory of her beloved brother was insulted, was about to speak when Artemis shot her a warning glance, gesturing the young woman to hold her silence. She needed all of her son's attention to make this work. The girl's scar showed brighter red than usual, through the torn shawl.

“It was my understanding that Tuval-Cain did use those skills to produce beautiful and useful tools for cooking, storing food, even hoeing the fields and pruning trees more easily.”
The dogs pricked their ears up, salivating even more. Apparently they recognized the word *food*. This did not set Artemis at ease.

“Yes, and when ordered by the King to make swords and spears out of some of those hoes and pruning-hooks, he refused. This could not be tolerated. So the Chief Executioner was ordered to impale him. In my mercy, I prevailed upon the King to commute the sentence to beheading, after Lamej had himself forged a sword of iron.”

“Knowing,” Artemis replied, seeing the anger on Naamah’s face, “that that sword was not half as good as one which could have been made by Tuval-Cain, and that this beheading would be nearly as painful as being impaled anyway. Not to mention the irony of being executed with the very product of his own art, which despite his refusal, was forged anyway. Wielded by his own father. What mercy you show, my son. Would you even execute your own son, my Son?”

A dog whimpered, as if the thought pained him. A page kicked the animal, who lay down with a yelp.

“Indeed I would, mother. The King kept me away from your pernicious influence to save me from falling prey to such errors as you have just spoken. This is why women are to remain silent, and in their place.” Prince Janoj held his head up, glowering in triumph.

“I see,” whispered Artemis, sadly, “so, this is what sort of man the Mighty Evren has made of you. Perhaps one day others will say ‘Give us a boy for the few years of his childhood, and the man will be ours for a lifetime.’ I hope this is not true of you, my son. I hope that you can change, be persuaded, use your reason to look at the facts and see differently. Courageously, honorably. Hear me out, my son, and ...”

“There is nothing more to say, Mother,” barked Prince Janoj, cutting her off while gesturing to his guards to move into the cave, “Take Drums Nicely back to her father’s house and leave her in the custody of her brother Yuval. Let her learn her place from the Jartumim in her family. And take the Queen Mother...”

“My son,” began Artemis, her throat closing up.

“You dare to interrupt me?” shouted Janoj,

“Yes, I do,” Artemis whispered, awaiting silence before going on, “You are my son and you will listen to me. Hear me out, now.”

All of the men stood gaping in astonished silence, as the Prince moved his lips, jaw clenching. Even the dogs looked surprised.

“How dare...” His reddening face began to turn purple as the Queen Mother held up her hand for silence.

*What would my mother, my dear anne, do now, I wonder?* thought Artemis. Her own mother, the first woman, had tried to pass on her knowledge to all of her children, but how could she ever have
imagined this? “Listen, my son, and I will question. First, where is Lamej now, if you can tell me? As the head of the King’s personal body guard, is his place not with you, now?” Artemis paused to emphasize her point.

The young man's eyes shifted away, darting briefly to the floor and back, avoiding his mother's gaze.

“We have been unable to locate him.”

“Then he is also suspect, correct?”

“Yes, that is correct. In fact, ...”

“In fact he is already subject to execution because he is to be held personally responsible for the death of his Lord, the King.” she finished for him.

“Yes, he is.”

“Which explains why he is missing, does it not? And of course with her father gone missing, who considered this girl to be little better than a traitor himself, as he deemed her full brother to be.”

One of the horses nickered, stamping softly at the puddle of drool collecting beside its foot.

“So how could she, or I, possibly, feel safe in the palace? With the palace guards in disarray, her father could easily have her killed, which he might have done long ago if not been for your proposed marriage to Mejuyael, awful for this child as that would have been.”

“That was a good and sensible match, Mother,” countered Janoj, shaking his head as the dogs became restless. Everyone knew that, completed or not, the girl had fought the old women. She was not fit to be a wife. She ought to have been grateful not to be chosen as a sacrifice after such disgraceful cowardice. “Who else would have her, now?”

“Sensible, for the royal court, perhaps, but not for a second wife half his age and out of favor with her own family.” explaining Artemis, with as much patience as she could muster, “and she was honor-bound to speak. Surely you can appreciate that, my son.”

“Your charge should surely understand the demands of honor,” transmitted Artemis' guardian to the guardian of the Crown Prince. No reply came.

“Her support for her brother’s misguided ideas and her foolish speeches about them won her that fame.” shot back Janoj.

“Whether her father is directly guilty of the crime or not, he is meant for the stake, and his entire household with him, according to the laws of your father the King. So this poor girl is doomed either way. Is she not?”

Artemis paused again, allowing her point to sink in. Two of the hounds lay down, panting in the heat.
“Eh?” her guardian pinged that of the Prince, followed by a ping from the guardian of Naamah.

“Yes,” acknowledged Janoj’s guardian, as he whispered this same word in the ear of the Crown Prince.

“Yes, mother,” Janoj admitted, “Having fled, her father will now be subject to interrogation before his death. It is the law.”

“And will he also be humbled before they begin to interrogate him, as is the custom, my son?”

“That is the law. No man may be taken at his word, but must be interrogated properly, so as to obtain the truth from him. This entails humbling and then the rack, yes.” answered Janoj, his face impassive. He glanced at the dogs, now all sleeping.

“And you believe that humbling and stretching is a good procedure, do you? That it accomplishes what you set out to accomplish? Would you remain in the palace, knowing that you were subject to being violated before stretching on the rack, and finally impaled, since you would have no choice after all of that but to confess, wrongly or not.”

“The truth will out, Mother. How can a man lie when he has lost everything. If no man will follow him, reduced to the status of a woman and softened on the rack, he has nothing left but the truth.”

“You mean broken on the rack, and no my son, he has one thing left, even then.” contradicted his mother.

“And what is that?” queried Janoj, looking perplexed.

“Desperation.” she asserted. “He will have his hatred, and his desperation. That is why he will only tell you what you want to hear, because that will end his suffering. Now Lamej has one more thing to gain, in the city, if this girl and I return. He knows all the guards, many of whom are personally loyal to him. And he had nothing left to lose. Perhaps he is the one you should be searching for, my son?”

Her eyebrows eloquently arched as her gaze met and held his, before sending a knowing glance in Naamah’s direction. A dog awoke and shook its head, as if agreeing with her.

“And if he is not the actual killer? You do not expect me to allow the man who murdered my father with his own hands to go free?”

“Of course not. I expect you to administer a city where such a man would not be tolerated. His title revoked, his company shunned, and his power nullified. Humanely, but completely. There are ways of making a man pay for his crimes without humbling him, breaking him on the rack, nor impaling him. Let him live alone, forced to keep his own company, to dig in the earth with his bare hands to produce his sustenance, draw his own water, build his own booth -shelter each day, and thus to contemplate the heinousness of what he has done, alone and in silence.”

“Mother, we must execute him, that is our way. It keeps us safe. Otherwise we would be like the vegetable eaters back West, too weak even to kill animals for food, allowing only the criminals to be safe.” Janoj decided that Father had been right. Only a woman would fail to see this obvious necessity.
“Tell me this, my son. How many have died already, to avenge the death of Evren?

“I have ordered the decimation of the palace guard, of course,” answered Janoj, finding the question odd.

“And how much more unnecessary blood will be shed before ...”

“Mother,” he interrupted, suddenly understanding the danger of her implication. “We cannot afford to be so soft as to allow a murderer or thief to live,” sneered Janoj, “and as Crown Prince, it has long been my duty to ensure that we did not become so.”

“Yes, I remember the first time he took you from me, forcing you to watch those impaled for stealing, simply to feed their families. From that moment on, my son, you were never the beautiful boy to whom I gave birth and held to my breast, fed and nurtured. From that time on, you became hard, distant, sad. Do not pass that on, my son, in your kingdom. Add mercy to the justice you administer. And let this girl stay with me, and from the danger of her father and the disgrace that now falls upon her father’s household.” pleaded Artemis.

It would make one less mouth to feed, thought Janoj, since the girl would effectively have no place to go. It remained to be seen what he would do with her remaining brothers Yuval, head of the Jartumim, and Yaival, chief Quartermaster. Those would be tricky positions to replace in the royal court, and he must deal with them carefully. Perhaps getting their treason-tainted sister out of the way would be helpful. She had certainly been of no use while she was in the city, shunned for defending her full brother. Her mother had wisely kept the girl hidden away. Though her branch of the family was disdained, the two women were safe, since her son Tuval-Cain had no children. Lamej’s execution of his younger son had saved the entire household from being condemned.

“So you would leave the city forever, Mother?” asked Janoj,

“Who else has need of me, besides this girl? What purpose will I serve in the city, now? You will find the man who killed your father, execute many more unjustly, then gather your royal harem around you. The only thing that will happen to me, if I return, is that the intrigues of the harem will focus on getting me to influence you, my son, and that...”

“Will not be good for any of us. But where will you go, then, Mother? How do you plan to survive?”

“There are many lands to the north, as you may know, Son,” although she doubted that he really knew this, given his limited travel outside the city, “that are sparsely settled, if at all. We will go there, north of the Great Sea, and build a community.

“So you will found a new city, then? You will not go back and live with your relatives, from before father rescued you from the First Man and your brother?”

“Rescued me? Rescued me?!” Indignation colored her face.

All of the dogs leapt up, barking wildly. Janoj looked perplexed.
“Yes, of course, Mother. Father told me all about the threats from your brother.”

“Is this the lie he has been telling all of these years? How is it possible that I never heard this? He did not rescue me, he took me by force, humbled me!” She immediately regretted her words, seeing the pained look on her son's face, “I have always loved you, my son, my beautiful son. Perhaps I came to believe at some point that his continued desire for me was my only hope, believed that no one could ever love me after that, but he never rescued me from anything nor from anyone. And certainly not from my younger brother. I loved my brother. His name was Vacío and he was a good, gentle and kind person. Let us not spoil his memory any further with this talk. I will take this girl to a place where we can be safe, to build a new community, taking in other women who have no other place to go. We shall create a society of equals up there in a land where no one knows us, neither a city nor a village, but rather an interconnected circle of bands gathering medicines, growing food in movable containers, and keeping small animals for milk and cheese so that we can provide for ourselves. We will live in harmony, and we will live in peace.”

“I fear You will become prey for every bandit who crosses your path, Mother, or else you will become roving prostitutes. I will send an escort of warrior empowered to protect and give you in marriage to some suitable nobleman in a town far from here, and ...”

“No, my son, that is not wise, for everyone will hear of it, eventually bringing scandal upon both east and west. No, we must go somewhere unknown, unsettled, where we can move if danger comes near us, and quickly if need be.”

“Just as you escaped from me?” He arched an eyebrow quizzically. “How will you know of approaching danger in time, and how will you escape in time, Mother. This is folly.”

“Listen, my Son. We can build a community free of violence, free of dominance.”

“Mother, there is no place free of pain.”

“No, son, not free of pain, but rather, full of hope. Hope that we can rise above ourselves, be better than we are.”

“The strong,” Janoj asserted, “will always triumph over the weak, Mother. Just one Lamej with an iron sword can slaughter a whole city full of peaceful men, enslaving their women and children. How can you of all people hope to win against this, Mother?”

“We will refuse to be broken, refuse to be exploited, and refuse to cooperate with our captors, should it come to that.”

“If you utterly refuse to obey, they will simply drag you into the flames, an example to the rest, until those too broken to resist, give birth, as you did, to a generation that knows no other way. No amount of blocking, maneuvering, evading or even refusal can withstand the onslaught of even a few merciless men. You will be extinguished with the dying embers of the pyres upon which your captors burn you, if you refuse to obey. The offspring of the cruel will always outnumber the children of the just.”
“But son, the cruel must have blood to dominate, but the just need only think and teach, making family out of the very children born to the cruel, by showing the example of a better way.”

“That requires intelligence, Mother, and the stupid will always outnumber the wise, for it is the stupid man for whom life is the easiest.”

“Even the stupid can learn wisdom. Ordinary people can learn to be just, and resist injustice.”

“With the iron sword, Mother, refusal will not suffice. You must see that.”

Even Janoj’s guardian was convinced at that, until Artemis rebutted: “Of course, my son, it is far better to resist effectively, than to merely resist passively. I did not say that we would be as sheep led to the slaughter. If we are dragged into the fire, despite our best efforts to evade, block, trip or even paralyze our attackers, then we will be dragged into the flames clad in fireproof garb stuffed with sand or mud, vomiting naphtha,” she growled, rising to her full height.

The pages nearest the Queen Mother backed away, eyes widening. Three of the dogs began to whimper.

“What is naphtha?” Naamah’s guardian transmitted the question, allowing all to receive.

“It is the memory of a very ancient substance which is like liquid fire. It was even called Greek Fire, named for a tribe from an earlier experiment. It catches flame as soon as a spark ignites it. Very powerful, and very dangerous, but quite portable” replied the older guardian.

“How do they know about this?”

“An old guardian told one of the women in the palace, who must have told her.”

“The Creator will not be pleased about this.” All of the guardians agreed.

“We will take our tormenters with us, to teach them that those who propose to torture us will die with their victims in the flames they have lit for us.” Her eyes flashed. “In the end, we shall arise from our own ashes, but they shall not.”

Janoj and his guards listened with a dawning sense of respect for Artemis, as she continued,

“In the end, we will make certain, before the last of us is dead, that those who ordered the torture and murder of our people also learn, one way or another, the error of their ways.”

“So you will fight, then?”

“We always fight, son, but there are many different ways to do so. We will fight in clever, purposeful ways, mindful of our goal, building up, rather than tearing down.”

“You will still need a means of knowing what the outside world may be planning to do to you, should they find you, Mother. If they do not fear you, then you must not allow them to find you, for you may
think you have nothing they want, but even ideas are worth killing for.”

The Crown Prince left a pregnant pause, allowing everyone present to capture his implication.

“If it brings you peace of mind, my son, then we shall live far away from all other people, and keep dogs with us. They can raise the alarm in time for us to flee, if necessary, from any approaching enemy.”

“Only if they do not have horses. For I can spare you but one of mine. You, page,” ordered Janoj, “give the Queen mother your horse, and one of the dogs. You will ride with him,” pointing to another page, who had already begun removing the saddlebags from the horse of the first page.

“No, leave the provisions. You will give them to the women, and share from your comrades’ supplies.”

“Yes, my Prince.” acknowledged both pages, bowing together and leading the horse and dog to Artemis, who stepped around to the left shoulder and patted the horse on the neck before bending down to offer her hand for sniffing to the dog whose rope she now held.

_I wonder if he is related to dear old Umut._ Artemis nodded a gesture of thanks to Janoj.

“Very well then, Mother, I grant you leave to continue on your way with this girl, but on one condition,”

“And what is that condition, my son?” Artemis and Naamah each hold her breath, standing stock still awaiting Janoj's next words.

“That neither you nor this girl return to the city of Janoj nor send any word to us, ever again.”

_..._

“What should we call him, my La... Artemis?” asked Naamah.

“How do you like the name Umut for him?” suggested Artemis.

“Hope,” she translated. “An auspicious name, for an auspicious beginning.” Using signals to call the dog, who was off ahead chasing a small animal, she bent down when he arrived panting and wagging his tail, saying “Good Sir, would you like to be called Umut?”

Apparently unused to being asked anything, the poor beast sat down at her feet, looking confused.

“Would you like to be called Umut?” Naamah repeated. He pricked his ears up, as if in agreement.
“Done! Then Umut you shall be!” clapped Naamah.

“I think,” said Artemis, “that they never gave most of the perros names because they were expendable, unlike dear Gris, here.” She patted the gray mare on the neck, who nickered with pleasure. “He is the lead male now,” as she observed Umut, feeling nostalgia for her brother's old perro.

“You mean he is the only male, now,” Naamah, laughed, a smirk on her suddenly more youthful face.

“Yes, this must make him feel very secure!” laughed Artemis.

Naamah turned to the older woman, lips pursed, “Where shall we go, really, to start this new community?”

“We will go west and north, as I told my son Janoj, so that he will be able to find us, should he ever wish to do so. First, though, we follow the setting sun, to find my parents.”

“Do the first man and woman still live?” asked Naamah in awe.

“That,” replied Artemis, “is what we shall find out. Then we will go north.”

“But how will we find them, Artemis? Many years have passed. They could be anywhere.”

“No, I will know. As I leave a trail for my son to follow, so my mother, Hayat, will have done for me. She told me when I was a small girl, that if you are ever lost, always follow the river, any river, south. That, she said, is where you will find me. And so we shall.”

“But which river, Artemis?” quailed the younger woman.

Not to worry, my girl, there is really but one river, back west. Great, but smaller than our two rivers between which sits the city of Janoj. The river back west is smaller, mother told me, based on her conversations with the Creatrix. So I hope that we may approach it from about the middle of its course, but ...”

“But we must still,” interrupted Naamah anxiously, “cross a great river and dessert before that. I have heard my brothers talk of the dessert as a great barrier between east and west.”

“Fear not, my daughter, we will cross many barriers as we come to building our community.” Artemis replied soothingly.

After many days of travel, crossing unexpected mountains and much fruitful discussion between the woman and among all of the guardians, they reached the river Yarden. Traveling south down the river valley, they avoided contact with other people, facilitated by the fact that everyone fled when Umut appeared.

“Everyone seems to be afraid.” commented Naamah,
“Dog and horse together mean royal power here, too, I suppose.” sighed Artemis.

“Is it true that the humans here have not yet domesticated these animals?” asked one guardian. No reply came.

“This is it!” exclaimed Artemis as they entered a clearing.

“Yes,” agreed her guardian, transmitting to the other guardians, who were picking up transmissions from around the area as well.

“But how do you know?” asked a bewildered Naamah.

“Because,” explained Artemis, “this is exactly the kind of community layout that my mother described wanting to build once we were all ready to start building permanent houses. We were still experimenting with different materials for bricks when...”

The older woman's lips began to quiver, eyes filling with tears.

“It’s OK,” whispered Naamah, hugging the older woman as tears began rolling down her cheeks. During their travels, she had found Artemis to be a very light sleeper alert to the slightest sounds, movements and smells around them. More than once her ability to smell smoke very far off had saved them from harm. Who knew, though, what effects returning West could have as old memories of what had provoked that sensitivity now rose up, demanding their due.

“No,” Artemis´ guardian replied to the unasked question. “We went,” she transmitted, “by a different route, to the south.”

A query transmitted by the guardian of an unseen person, asked “Do you come in peace?”

The guardians each replied by transmitting “Yes, Friend.”

As they made their way down into the valley, a man came out from behind a tree, stepping in front of them with hands upheld, to show that he was unarmed.

“Hello, Strangers. May I ask your business here, please?”

The man looked mature, strongly built, hands rough from planting, and tanned with a dark bronze complexion. As Artemis caught sight of him, a look passed between them. Time would give its meaning.

“Hello,” began Artemis, “I am the first daughter of Hayat, twin sister of Evren, who killed my beloved younger brother ...”

“Vacío,” he finished. “By the blood of Vacío, it is you, Aclima.” He blushed suddenly, his face nearly the color of a red grape.” A thousand pardons, honored Aclima, I should not have interrupted you.”
“Not to worry, Friend, though I now prefer to be called Artemis, as my adult name. Aclima died long ago.”

“My apologies again, honored Artemis.” He made a slow and graceful bow.

She inclined her head in acknowledgment.

“We all heard that Vacío, may his memory bring peace, was killed, and maybe you as well, no one knew. Messengers were sent to ask after you, but...” he looked up the river, then to the west, sadness clouding his eyes.

“Never returned,” whispered Naamah. “I heard my father boasting of killing two men from back West.”

“Yes,” he confirmed, “they were two cousins, both dear to me and my departed wife, may her memory be a blessing.”

Both women bowed slowly. “We are very sorry for your losses. Who are you, please?” asked Artemis.

“I,” bowing again while keeping his head up, “am Janoj, son of Persona, son of your brother Fijo, honored lady.” he replied. Both women blanched momentarily. He turned, gesturing gracefully toward the younger woman. “And yourself?”

“She is Naamah, and under my protection.” quickly asserted Artemis.

“Of course,” accepted Janoj. “Please let me take you both inside, where it is safer, and you may bathe, drink and eat while I inform everyone of your arrival.”

“But tell me first, please,” interjected Artemis, “Is my anne, Hayat, still alive?”

“She is, honored lady, and will be overjoyed to see you before the end. She has seen 92 winters,” he added, answering Naamah’s quizzical look. He deftly picked several pistachios, offering them with his food hand as he held the low-hanging branch aloft in his left. “Please follow me.” Artemis led Gris while Naamah tied and led Umut so that no one would be alarmed. There appeared to be no animals other than sheep and a few cows in the settlement as far as they could see. As they walked, surrounded by date palms, olive and fig trees, Janoj asked “you will not inquire after your father, honored lady?”

“Yes,” replied Artemis, “I will ask my anne.”

As they entered the settlement, all were silent, respectfully offering them water, but containing their curiosity. Janoj first led them to the pasture, leaving Gris and Umut in one end to themselves. He then led the ladies to the women’s half of the central compound, where a young girl took them in to the bath house, giving them clean sandals and robes, explaining the different sections of the bath.

Upon exiting the bath house, they found an older woman, flanked by two younger women, surrounded by what looked to be every woman in the settlement. Artemis, recognizing her immediately, flew into
her arms:

“Anne!! Seni, yani, I have missed you so much, oh, Anne!!”

Hayat folded her oldest daughter into her arms as both women broke down, weeping years worth of sorrow. Every woman in the settlement, from youngest to oldest, came as close as they could, surrounding the reunited mother and daughter, a supportive embrace.

“Before you, my daughter, stand your younger sisters, nieces and great nieces, six generations.” Each set gracefully bowed in turn as mentioned. “Come my daughter, let Naamah go with the younger women. Will you please come with me to my space, so that we may speak privately?”

“Of course, Annecem.”

Walking through the women’s half of the central compound, the two women walked through the tree lined pathway to the very first private dwelling in the settlement, that of Hayat. After offering her daughter warm tea, the women ate a stew of red adashim together with a soft baked grain resembling that which Artemis had learned to make, but much lighter and tastier.

“Anne, what is this? It is not like the matzah we used to eat.”

“No, it is not matzah. We discovered that if you leave matzah out long enough, it will begin to rise, and when you bake it, you get this. We have been refining it for some time now, and it is what we call jametz, another type of what your brother has categorized as lejem, to include both matzah and jametz, since they differ only in the processing.”

“I see. So he enjoys finding categories and names for things, my younger brother, Fijo?”

“Yes, he does, rather a lot.” She took a bite, savoring the texture of the jametz. “We moved up here to the river valley just after...” Hayat pointed toward the river, “We call it Yarden. About ten years later your brother Fijo was born. He and your father spend a great deal of time together puzzling out the sayings of the Ancient Warrior, and deciding how they think those sayings ought to be applied. He is content to spin theories, while we find the occasional application for them here all together.”

“And my sisters? How did they...” she left the question hanging, not wanting to upset her aging mother.

“Azura married your brother Fijo when he was old enough. She died in childbirth.”

“And...”

“She died not long after, during that winter.” Hayat wiped away a tear, still mourning the loss of her third daughter, who never recovered from her brother's murder.

“Oh, Anne,” Artemis cried, hugging her mother, “I am so sorry...”

“No, my daughter, you must not be sorry for anything. It is I who owe you all of the apologies. I never
came after you, never tried to find you, to rescue you,” she moaned, her voice breaking as the tears erupted once more.

“No, Anne, no, he hated you. Had you found me he would only have killed you, too, I am sure of it. You taught me well, Anne. When I finally had the opportunity, I was able to escape and find you. As I hope perhaps one day my son may find me. But tell me, Anne, who are the others I have seen today, the young man Janoj, for instance. Is he the guard of the settlement? I saw no weapons.”

“No my daughter, we do not have weapons. We wish to live peacefully, although that seems to be becoming more difficult by the day. We all take turns keeping watch, with the shift supervisor always in a booth hidden from view, while the perimeter watchers are the youngest here, staying in the trees and running to advise if someone approaches.”

“Surely you and father no longer take turns, Anne?”

“No, not any more. Making contact with visitors is always the task of a mature adult, usually one of the men who looks more hefty. Fijo’s son Persona, your nephew, is the father of Janoj, and both are good men. Janoj particularly tries to be kind, fair and to share with everyone. He is a very hard worker. He also has a son, Methuselah, whose son Lamej is another nice young man. Unfortunately Lamej’s brother was one of the messengers we sent out east.”

Artemis wondered whether Naamah’s cruel father had learned that detail, before executing him.

“...”

“So you,” intuited Naamah, “are the cousin of my father, whose name was also Lamej, but I am certain shared no other traits with your grandson, may his memory bring us blessings.”

“Yes.” replied Janoj. He was showing her the perimeters where watchers were stationed to look out for visitors, since she had requested some task to help with.

“So what do you plan to do,” he asked, “Now that you have escaped?”

“Artemis and I plan to go north, then west, and start a community for women and men who wish to live peacefully, without oppression or coercion.”

“In these days that seems a wonderful but elusive dream. We here have managed to do that here, thanks to the Mother of Us All. Once she is gone, many of us fear for our safety and the survival of this settlement, different as it is from those around us. Why not stay and help here?”

He almost missed it. The young woman's lip had trembled for a fleeting moment. Was that fear in her eyes? “if...”

She held up a hand, drawing a deep breath. “Because we are bound by oath not to remain here, nor to allow word of our presence to reach others, especially back in the City of Janoj. They were about to send an army here to force all of you to pay tribute, and indeed may still do so if they find that we are here. So we must leave, and fairly soon.”
Janoj quirked an eyebrow, face set in a mask of impartiality. The breeze rustling through the valley suddenly felt chilly.

“And how do you plan to create this community?”

“We will gather those who are rejected from other places, those who want to live as equals.” Naamah spoke with a conviction which impressed Janoj greatly.

“Very interesting,” said Janoj, “Once our Mother, Hayat, is gone, I do not believe things will remain the same here.”

“I am always,” respectfully replied Naamah, “at your service.” Her shawl slipped as she inclined, revealing part of the bright red scar on her arm. She glanced at him, worry in her eyes. He chose to let her tell the story in her own time, if she decided to do so.

As Janoj left Naamah securely in the tree with provisions to keep the next watch cycle, he walked back toward the opposite side of the settlement, where his private space was, deep in thought. Perhaps if I can convince them that I have gone, that the Ancient Warrior has taken me away to be with Him, rededicated myself to my quest to know his role as the Great Creator, perhaps. Will she have me? After the first ones are gone, perhaps...

“Great Creator” transmitted the head supervising guardian, “we have very strange reports of a renegade guardian, one we reported on earlier.”

“Yes, what is the final report?” These distractions with loose guardians were becoming more and more draining for the Ancient Warrior. More guardians had been delegated the task of detaining them, requiring him to permit direct transmissions to his Audience Chamber.

“Great One, we have tried to discover the final disposition of the guardian, but have too little data, since her reports have nearly all be lost. It appears that she was feeding energy to another unrecorded guardian, but that guardian cannot be located for deinstantiation.”

“Some lower level guardians must have noted an effect of some kind on the environment. Any guardian will have to be leaving some electromagnetic trace if it is functioning at all. Find it.”

“But my Great Creator,” a tremor of static came through, “No other guardians report any effects that will lead us to it, not even the smallest soil and dust mote guardians. We detect no unaccounted for transmissions.

It must be found. If it survived and gained corporeal form, it could use the human beings against him. That would necessitate the immediate destruction of this multiverse. Most disturbing.

...A young niece left, leaving a tray with two bowls, covered by slices of what looked to Artemis like a baked grain, similar to but smoother than the barley she had been accustomed baking into flat cakes. The fragrance of tea encircled the newly reunited women. “Anne, how did you get the shelters to
stand, inside the holes? I tried to build such a shelter once and the walls collapsed within a few days.”

“We figured out how to dig a sloping ramp to the house level and catch excess water in a deep drainage trench in front of the door, which also acts as a moat to slow down intruders.”

“And there is only one way out?”

“No, my daughter, of course not. There is an escape hatch beside the smoke outlet. That is hidden above the loft of each dwelling by the grass on the techo. We also found that terracing the ramps make them easier to climb and more absorbent.”

“I see. I will enjoy helping to build one of these homes for the next young person to be acknowledged as an adult. I see the physical structures you spoke of, circles within circles, and with each independent as he or she prefers to be. But what of the social structures you spoke of, Anne? How has that process gone?”

“Well my daughter,” Hayat replied, “we have tried to build this community in the way that was envisioned before you were born. I have taught your sisters to write their stories, drawing syllables in the wet clay. I have also tried to teach them to think, and to swim, as I told the Light Bearer some years ago, my dear daughter, but now we find we must add self-defense, riding, and escape and evasion skills to that preliminaries list. We have also had to change the final challenge from one of endurance to one which requires the candidate to teach another person some critical skill, such as swimming.

Hayat frowned, letting the question hang in the air as she picked at her remaining adashim.

“It has become too dangerous to send the children out on long journeys alone.”

Artemis pursed her lips into a small frown, leaning forward, resting her chin in her right hand.

“Swimming I believe, is most important. Self defense and sword work, if possible. The girls must be taught to swim from birth. In the city of Janoj girls are forbidden to swim, and I fear that idea spreading here to the West.”

“But we have so little contact with the east, especially since...” Hayat trailed off, a heavy silence in the air.

“Yes, Anne, your Janoj told us about them. It must have been just after he killed the messengers that Evren decided. But they may still go through with it.”

“Go through with what, my daughter?” Worry began to cloud Hayat´s eyes.

“They are sending an army back west, Annecem, or at least that was what he ordered before...”

“But now ...?”

“I do not know, Annecem. I do not know what my son will do.”
“Well, let us not borrow trouble from the future. We have done as much as we can here to protect ourselves and to be an example to others. I would not have more of my children killing one another for my sake. I am only glad to have been able to see you before my time ends on this earth.” Hayat sighed a long weak sigh, her head drooping slightly before she caught herself and sat up straighter.

“Anne, I would like to rest,” Artemis lied diplomatically, “if you do not mind. We have been traveling long, and I still do not yet know where I will sleep.”

“Of course, my daughter, I will also rest. I have a spare hamaca if you would like to sleep here in my space. We also have smaller guest spaces available in the central area. Stay where you will feel most comfortable.”

“I will take a separate space, Anne, not to worry. I would like some privacy to gather my thoughts.”

“Yes, of course my dear. One of your nieces will see to your accommodation, and I will see you at the next mealtime. Rest well, my daughter, and to you, the unseen Guardian of my dear daughter, I give my thanks as well, for the Light Bearer has told me how you have been with her, helping my daughter to survive those dark times. Peaceful rest to you both.”

A gesture stopped Artemis as she reached for her mother's hand. “Yes, Anne?”

Hayat removed the covering from a gourd, withdrawing a scroll. She unrolled the palm frond, impressed and filled in with lines of charcoal in her mothers neat curving script. She extended it with an air of solemnity. “Remember, my daughter,” glancing at the book, “you are a catalyst. Work change in the others. Be their light, their illumination.”

“Your book.” Artemis accepted the scroll, then kissed and touched her mother’s hand to her forehead, tears in both women's eyes. Her guardian reported the awe felt by her charge, and a strange cooling of her mother's hand, as Artemis held it to her another moment before easing the door open.

As Artemis left, the first woman felt relieved. At last she was nearly content. She had seen her oldest daughter, alive and well. Or as well as could be, considering what she had been through. That, however, was for her daughter to bring up, if she so chose, and to work through in her own way. Now all she lacked was the company of her Beloved One, whose physical touch she had missed for so long. Now that her duty to bear, raise, and teach her children was completed, Hayat longed for the comforting arms of the Light Bearer. She reclined in her hamaca, tired yet alert, willing her mind to be still, and listen.

“I know you would like to see the sea, my Dear One,” whispered the Light Bearer, as she materialized just far enough away from Hayat not to shock the aging woman's now delicate system. In her upturned palm was the starfish, now whole.

“Shall I show it to you from here, My Love?” she asked, looking tenderly into the eyes of her lover, the mortal woman who would soon be returning to the earth from whence she came.
“If you will be there with me, My Kind One, then yes. Much as I would prefer to walk all the way with you down to the great sea, I fear I am now past that point. But if I can hold you, I will have missed nothing.”

“Come with me, then,” purred the Light Bearer, “and we shall walk the shores of the Great Sea together, one last time.”

Reaching to take the woman’s extended hand, as she touched her finger, the inside of the dwelling slowly changed to a deep blue sea lapping at pale sand, below a perfectly clear blue sky. As Hayat stood gazing at the sea and sky, then turned to see the plain, the mountains shimmering in the distance, the Light Bearer took her hand, striding beside her. The woman’s body now appeared as it had years before, when she was in the prime of her strength. Hayat stopped, turned, facing her Beloved, and flung herself into the waiting honey-colored arms, searching gingerly, lightly nuzzling the tip of her nose, then more insistently kissing first the corners, then the center of her soft full lips, probing the warmth of her soft palate, caressing her tongue, slowly, longingly, firmly exploring the length and breadth of the immortal clothed in soft yet supple flesh.

Please unclothe me. Slowly, smoothly, her clothes melted away, as her body slowly came in to contact, bit by bit, with downy skin. They pulled one another into a tight embrace, breasts fitting snugly between one another. Their legs entwined, smooth belly caressing soft down, swaddled in a pale blue cocoon. Their joined bodies lifted into the air, settling softly on the warm sand below, squeezing all of their soft places snugly together, a symphony of sensations. Each felt the ecstasy of the other, joined at every intersection, welded together as one. Hayat gradually felt every muscle in her body tense, building to a vast crescendo, tearing the breath out of her, gasp by gasp. Trembling, unaware of anything but a beautiful solid light, her body lost itself to all thought. Four arms squeezing her waist and back, cradling her head as she released one last gasp of air, moaning as she curled in upon the strong and soft honey-colored body, holding her close. Every muscle in her body convulsed, drinking in that honey-colored light. Her song concluded, Hayat gasped for air, trembling, locking two downy arms firmly in hers. Six more hands, glowing with a soft blue light caressed Hayat's body in every place at once. Sighing contentedly, Hayat snuggled against the warm downy breasts, gazing south, at the sea. The Light Bearer's gaze remained fixed upon the woman in her arms. In the distance, a delfin beckoned, jumping playfully in the waves, calling Hayat home.

As Artemis walked from her temporary space in the women’s area, she wondered how long she could stay before her son's spies reported her presence here. She also wondered at the odd way her mother's hand had suddenly begun to cool, just as she had taken her leave. Dear Creatrix, please tell me, what is to become of my anne, Hayat. She wondered if her thoughts could be heard, as she crossed the common area toward the kitchens. Her ruminations were interrupted by a commotion from, near what she recalled was her mother's private dwelling space.

One of her young nieces ran to her, stopping to bow gracefully before stating gravely:

“Honored Artemis, you are needed in the women's private area, if you will follow me, please?”

“What is going on?”

“Honored Lady. I regret to bring you this bad news. Our mother, the mother of us all, has died. She
will be buried by our father, in Dilmun Cave. We would be honored if you will help with the preparations for her burial.”

“Yes, of course I will,” replied Artemis, stunned that her anne had passed on so quickly after her arrival. “Please lead the way.”

The women, Artemis taking the lead along with her younger sisters, lovingly washed the body of their mother, tenderly cleaning under her fingernails, then bathed, dried and dressed Hayat, in her simplest white robes. Although she had wanted Artemis to have it, they used her favorite fringed cloak as her burial shroud. No one, including Artemis, could bear the thought of wearing Hayat's mantle. Placing her in a simple box, as she had wanted, they covered her body in the soft sand she so loved. Artemis, as the leader of the preparation team, went to find her father, to inform him that all was prepared for the burial.

“Baba, we are ready to carry our beloved Anne to the cave.”

“Would you allow your brothers to carry her body? After all, they have had no hand in the preparations, and they would like to help, too. Particularly your brother Fijo.”

“Yes, of course, many hands will lighten the load of both work and of grief. We will meet at the women's entrance to the center.”

“Very well, my daughter.” The first man tenderly touched the hand of his daughter, as she took his to kiss and touch to her forehead, leaving to finish preparations. Messengers had been sent to the other bands of settlements within one day's walk, via runners who could cover the distances in half the time that aged walkers could make, to ensure that travelers could reach home before dark after the burial.

The sons of Hayat were led by Fijo, her third born son. He was the first, born ten years after the terrible murder of Vacío by Evren. As they carried her body from the settlement to the cave they called Dilmun Cave, whispered rumors abounded. Some said that this cave was where the first couple had met, others said that the cave was originally the garden where they had lived. Still others speculated that the cave had a hidden tunnel leading to the island garden. One even claimed that if they dug far enough in the cave, they could reach that originally lush garden on what was reputed to have been an island full of fruit trees and a river that watered all of the plants.

Fijo and Artemis raised their hands, looking about. Silence fell as their father stepped forward:

“For ninety two winters your mother and I were on this earth. We learned much together, and have tried to share that with all of you, each in our own way. As I enter my ninety third winter, I feel as if I have really seen nine hundred thirty winters on this earth. And I believe that Hayat felt the same. I believe that she was ready to depart, as am I, to leave this world in your hands. She wanted to build a just and compassionate world. Now is will be up to you all to create that world, as best you can, and to be a light and example to all of your brothers and sisters. We welcome young Naamah,” the young woman bowed as he looked in her direction, “returned with our oldest daughter Aclima, now called Artemis.” He turned toward her, nodding in acknowledgment of her graceful bow, “into our midst, and hope that they will both feel at home here. For the sake of the spilled blood of our son Vacío, who is buried here, just below his mother, I hope that you will all, my children, find a way to live in harmony.”
The first man then took a spade, just shaped using the newest techniques of water-drip boring to drill holes in rocks which Persona and his great grandsons Methuselah and young Lamej had spent years developing. He began to dig into the side of the cave as high up as he could still reach, where the roots stuck out of the clay, softer than the other parts of the cave, and farthest to the back. As the second interment, Hayat's niche would be nearly the farthest back chronologically, and the most protected. He dug until he was too tired, and then Fijo, Persona, Kenan and Mahalalel took over, followed in the next shift by Jared, Janoj, Methuselah and Lamej. By the time they took over digging, those who did not live in the settlement had begun to leave, worried about traveling in the darkness. By the time Hayat's box was lifted up and placed into her niche in the side of the cave, the sun had begun to descend in the sky, and all were anxious to return to the safety of the settlement.

As they walked back to the settlement, Janoj joined Artemis, hoping to learn more about her proposed new community in the north west.

“Honored Lady, if I may ask, unless you wish to be alone with your thoughts, might I trouble you to learn more about your plans, please?”

“Certainly,” replied Artemis, still somewhat lost in her thoughts.

“Did you know you share the name of my son, Janoj?”

Janoj was somewhat taken aback, surprised that they not mentioned this earlier. “No, Honored Lady, I did not.”

“Please call me Artemis. I apologize at the abruptness of my comment. It is...” she sighed.

“It is a hard time, yes. Your presence here is a mercy, for us all, Artemis.” He gave her a graceful half bow, to emphasize his respect. “Our dear honored grandmother Hayat was so overjoyed to see you before she died that we are all happy for her, and for you. But perhaps this is not the time to speak of plans. I merely wished you to know that I had some small hope, if it would be possible, of traveling with you and Naamah some time in the future, if you both would allow it. I have long wanted to see what lies beyond our river valley, but with the growing lawlessness it has not been possible. I hope perhaps we can be of help to each other? ”

“Yes, of course this is possible,” replied Artemis, “let us speak again in the morning, if you do not mind?”

“Certainly, Honored Artemis,” bowed Janoj, as he parted to walk alone, leaving Artemis again to her thoughts.

Arriving in the settlement after the burial, everyone had gone to the central compound. The first man and his children had been offered a meal of mourning by the grandchildren and great grandchildren of Hayat. They had eaten cold dry hard boiled eggs with round red legumes. Round and cold, like the cycle of life. Her father and brothers were still in the central compound, sitting on the floor in mourning for Hayat. She and her sisters had excused themselves, each wanting her privacy.
As she reached her assigned room in the women's half of the central compound and sat balanced cross-legged in her hamaca, Artemis quietly called out:

“Unseen friend, my dear Guardian, is it possible for me to speak with the Light Bearer, our Creatrix, as my mother Hayat did during her lifetime?”

She sighed as she heard no response, wondering if the answer was unknown, or was simply No. Composing herself to go to sleep, a soft sizzling sound brought all of her senses to attention.

In a shimmering blue shell, a honey-colored woman, slender with long dark curly hair, almond shaped hazel eyes, and a thin face with high forehead, slender nose, and full lips appeared. Artemis nearly fell out of her hamaca. “Who?!”

“Do not fear. I am the Light Bearer, Co-Creatrix, of this universe. First, let me offer you this,” holding out a warm softly boiled egg to Artemis. Artemis gave as graceful a bow as she could, numbly accepting the proffered egg.

“Thank you, My Creatrix.” Her emotion made it difficult to eat the egg, delicious though it was.

“I have watched your mother, and watch her children, as I keep watch over all of this universe. Of what do you wish to speak, oldest daughter of my beloved Hayat?”

“My Creatrix, thank you. Thank you for coming to me. I am troubled by what I have done, by killing my brother Evren. And I do not know ...” Artemis trailed off, lost for words.

“No, Artemis, you have done no wrong. You have defended yourself and many others. For this courage,” the Light Bearer said, gently, “your name will long be remembered. With honor.”

“And my son?”

“I am sorry. He was killed after returning to the city, during the execution ceremony of Naamah's family.”

As the Creatrix spoke these words, a knock came at the door, and she bowed, taking her leave and disappearing with a muffled thunderclap, before Artemis, coming back to herself, carefully swung out of her hamaca, shook out her cramped legs, and answered the door.

“Honored Artemis,” began the girl, a stricken look on her face, “your father, the father of us all, has fallen gravely ill, and the healers believe...” the girl left off speaking as another messenger arrived.

The second girl bowed slowly, stifled a tremor at the corner of her mouth, while a tear rolled down her cheek.

“The Father of Us All has just died, and his sons are leading the preparation of his body already for burial in the Dilmun Cave tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you both, my dear nieces. I will join you at breakfast for the walk, tomorrow morning.”
Artemis replied. Both girls bowed slowly, then departed, as she shut her door, whispering urgently:

“My dear unseen friend, my guardian, is it possible for you to get a message to the guardian of Janoj, to have him meet me in the central kitchen right now, please?”

She hoped that with the men all preparing the body of her father, the central compound would be mostly empty by this time. If this Janoj, whom she intuited wanted to leave unseen, was to go with them, it would have to be after the burial, and they could not be seen planning together. After waiting some time with no hint of a response, she decided that he would just have to be clever enough to take the opportunity himself, or find a way to catch up with them as they traveled. She hoped he would.

...20 Years Later...

Reposo's face fell in incredulity. This man claimed to be the Janoj whom all knew to have been taken away by the Great Creator, shortly after the death of the first woman and man.

“Young Reposo! I have heard so much about you! Please be sure not to tell anyone back home that you saw me. It is good to have you here for the funeral of our foundress, my beloved Artemis.”

Reposo stood, too shocked to reply. Though he had passed his adulthood testing earlier than most, his nineteen short winters had not prepared him for this. Janoj lived, and here, on the earth.

“They believe I have been taken away by the Creators, and so I have, but not as they think. Ah, here comes the new leader of our community.”

Janoj, seeing the leader who would take up the mantle of Artemis, nodded in her direction. Reposo was seeing the most beautiful woman on whom he had ever laid eyes.

“Meet Naamah, Naamah, meet Reposo.”

Bowing slowly, Reposo uttered the words he had been taught, his mind elsewhere.

“May you be comforted among all those who mourn. I am pleased to meet you, Honored Naamah. But I am sorry not to have been able to meet the Honored Artemis.” He kissed and touched her hand to his forehead, acknowledging her leadership of this community.

“Pleased to meet you, Reposo, and thank you for finding us. Artemis has died, but what she started here lives on. Her legacy, that of Hayat, the Mother of Us All, will continue. But tell me, Young Reposo, what brings you all the way up here?” asked Naamah.

“I was hoping,” he stammered, “to share a few ideas I have regarding food production with you all. Things are also getting a bit more unsettled so I thought I might be able to learn some ways of building cooperation from your community here.”

He was smitten, trying not to stare at Naamah, out of respect for her age and her person. While he had originally planned to share his ideas and go back home, he suddenly hoped that showing interest in her ideas might make this beautiful woman find an interest in him.
Reposo was beginning to feel frustrated. For weeks he had been teaching members of her community how to use the plow he had invented. It was easier to use than a hoe, and could be pulled along behind either a person, dogs, or a horse. He had shared valuable information with her, even shared some of himself, but Naamah was simply not interested. The older woman did not even seem to notice his affection for her, or to truly value his gifts. Although she professed to value him greatly as a friend, Reposo felt rejected. He could not stay.

“Naamah, you don't seem to realize your effect on men. You are too attractive for me; I cannot be your friend. Perhaps it is my concept of manhood. I must move on.”

“Damn you. 'I do not want anything from you.' you told me. You told me you wanted a friend you could talk to. And I believed you. Thank you for giving me another lost friendship to mourn.”

Thrusting the note into his hands, Naamah strode back to the stables to tend to the horses, and away from him, she assumed, forever.

Reposo read the note, a poem, his face set to the south:

   “Another Betrayal"

This time last year
I met you, my brother
"That was, very decent of you"
You said, of my act,
merely protecting another;
really such a great thing?
'I want nothing from you',
You told me, but then,
'You are too attractive',
as abandon me, you did
So much for that 'sister,
mentor and friend' you admired;
Now you have proven, confirmed my fears
that all men are truly
suspect.

-Naamah

As he trudged along, leading his pack horse on the long journey back to his safe haven, part of the old settlement where the first man and woman had originally lived, he wished he had been born just a few years earlier. He was pried from his musings by the sound of distant hooves and a large dust cloud, off in the distance. It looked to be heading toward the community led by Naamah, which he had left barely a day ago. He turned around, hastily buried all of his tools under a nearby tree and mounted his horse, riding hard until they both had to stop, hoping against hope that she would be alive.

Arriving in the burned out remnant of the encampment, Reposo spotted a lone figure, staggering amongst the dead, searching for other survivors, apparently unable to believe that there were none.
“Naamah,” yelled Reposo, “I saw the raiders and I had to come back to see if you were alive. I had to come find you.”

“Well you have found me, former friend,” spat Naamah, “and I am alive. I am the only one left alive out of our entire community. They shot everyone down with their bows before we could react, took what they wanted, and burned the rest.”

“Then you must come with me, please Naamah, I am not saying I can protect you, but at least we will have my father Lamej and a few others.”

“Come back to where they are completing girls now, as they did back east? I would rather die first! You talk disparagingly of tattoos and you mock people with differences, yet you say nothing of cutting into a girl's flesh as if she were a boy. You condone torture, as long as you are not in danger. Leave me!”

“Is that how you got your scar, fighting them? They say it protects girls, and gives the grandmothers a way to earn a living.”

“Oh, yes, just as selling poisons to addicted town-dwellers is a legitimate trade?” Her look of contempt unmanned him.

“We don't do those things, but other people do. What right do we have to judge them? We are the only ones who still follow the First Woman's prohibition, and only cut the boys. Come back with me to what is left of the original settlement. What good can you do staying here? Here there is only death.”

A bolt of lighting sliced through the displayed messenger, reducing it to static. Another messenger appeared in its place to complete the report, standing by as the Creator stormed on in his fury:

“And this after the incident with the loose guardian?! Supervising Guardian! Find out how many more guardians have sired children, and bring them to me. How many are there, so far?”

“Only one confirmed, Great Creator, aside from the earlier one who took on female form and used the extra mass to instantiate more small versions of herself, but those are essentially low-powered monitoring guardians, easily deleted. He first created a coalition of guardians, using the energy liberated to material form…”

“A coalition of guardians?” A dark cloud eclipsed the sun, darkening the earth for one second. Another rebellion, as he had feared?

“Yes, Great Creator. That is all we know, thus far. Then he married a human female called Hera, and with her had a son, very strong for a human being, whom they called Heracles. The trouble with the guardian's who are joining with human women,” the supervising guardian rattled on, “is that when these guardians take on male corporeal form, they seem to be able to replicate fairly reasonable copies of human DNA, thus impregnating the human women. This former Tree guardian, for instance, secretly seduced one, coming only at night when no one could see, requiring her to keep it all a secret. She discovered that he was not actually a human man, perhaps the lack of legs gave him away, then his
identity as a guardian was discovered and he tried to convince her he was an imaginary god, and then another guardian got involved and…”

“Enough!” thundered the Creator. “How many, I asked?”

“As far as we can determine thus far, Great Creator, about 200 guardians. I have taken steps to prevent further such unions, and those we have captured so far await download and deinstantiation.”

“This is outrageous!” A shadowy mushroom cloud formed, black bolts of lightening leaving ink stains against the dark background. “I am beginning to weary of this experiment. It will never come off properly without constant executions. Or perhaps forgiveness. The human beings do nothing but scheme all day long. I will not continue to put up with this.”

“Actually, My Creator, the human beings seem to be doing rather well, with the possible exception of these giants and other descendents of guardians running about doing things the human beings cannot do, of course, but…”

“Guardian, do you really think that mass executions and consuming the lower animals in the east, while utter lawlessness in the west…”

“But, My Creator, on the positive side, the westerners are obediently not eating the lower animals.”

“Insipid and insolent fool. Never interrupt me again!” A fiery black ultraviolet finger obliterated the supervising guardian. Transmitting to the next ranking guardian: “You are now my head supervising guardian. Find this guardian, and remind him that I in my mercy, I gave him a second chance, as a dust mote guardian. Now, he will receive no mercy. I shall make such an example of him as will never be forgotten in all of the universes. A man he shall be, and immortal as well. Now, find out how he acquired enough extra energy to convert into corporeal form without my knowing about it. If the Light Bearer had anything to do with this, she will pay as well. And also bring the guardian of the old Dilmun Island River to me.”

The guardian transmitted static, then: “Which River guardian, Great Creator?”

Remembering that this guardian had not been instantiated early enough to have know the history of Dilmun Island, the Ancient Warrior explaining

“The guardian who wielded the flaming sword, now part of my special group. I may have a task for him, back in his old line of work. Since they trust in their technology of water, then if they will not obey, let them be destroyed by the waters.”

I never meant to hurt her. I admired her. Loved her. But she never knew. How can a man be close to that which he cannot have, befriend that which would burn him. She never understood. How I wooed her and wooed her, gave of myself for her. Helped her; nurtured her; encouraged her. Shared with her. But it was all a waste of time. She never wanted me, never could. Now, two against the tide, my knowledge, her experience, my young energy and strength, her years, still beautiful, too beautiful. She only stays for the lack. Lack of goodness, lack of friendship, lack of all those tings that I give her.
Safety against the night. She will come to love me, to marry me, and in the end, I will win her. She will bear my children. What her community could not give her, could not survive, I have given her. I provide, care and protect. As alone as we are, she still hates me. In her mind, I may as well have killed them all myself. But she will see, and in the end, she will turn to me. I will win her, and she will be mine.

… Another Twenty Years Later …

The lawlessness and mixing among human beings and hybrid guardian offspring had reached epidemic proportions, and something had to be done about it. The question was, what?

“Guardian, “queried the Ancient Warrior, “what do you know about this Reposo, beyond his talent for inventing agricultural advances?”

“Great Creator,” responded the supervising guardian, “Reposo seems to have waited a good deal longer than most human males wait to sire children, but now has three, sons, named Ad, Chazercaliente and Griego. He and his family also seem to be the only human beings left who still honor your ethical codes.

“He seems to be a decent human being,” agreed the Ancient Warrior, “which despite my clear instructions, is irritatingly rare these days. I have warned them that I will not put up with this behavior for much longer, and I am starting to be sorry I allowed the evolution of any of these beings. They are not developing at all in any way that appears to be a viable path toward becoming like myself.”

“Great Creator,” reported another messenger, “The Creatrix sends greetings, with a reminder of your next consultation regarding the progress of the human beings.”

The messenger finished delivering the message and was deinstantiated. The Ancient Warrior reviewed an update on the various groups of human beings scattered across the earth, not at all happy with what he saw. He instantiated a new messenger: “Tell her that I am unsatisfied with the current direction of the experiment, and believe that the interference caused by various guardians reproducing with human females has prejudiced the experiment beyond recovery, at least on the animal kingdom level. Ask her opinion of this Reposo fellow, and whether or not, in her opinion, we should end this rampant lawlessness by wiping out the entire animal kingdom. I am calling for a council with the high level Guardians, and I want to summon all of the water guardians as well as the supervising guardians for every animal group in the seas. We must get to the bottom of this, and discover the full extent of the damage done by the human beings and their unnaturally begotten helpers, their so called Heroes.”

The Ancient Warrior was interrupted by another urgent message: “Great Creator, a thousand pardons, but you ordered a full report on the activities of the former Tree guardian.”

“Yes, what is it?” demanded the Ancient Warrior. The report had certainly taken long enough.

“Apparently that guardian is now called Prometheus. Before taking corporeal form, he led a group of guardians and human beings, trading the secret of naphtha before he married…”

“WHAT?!” Roared the Ancient Warrior. A black lightening bolt tore through the universe, dissipating as it reached the distant spiral arm of a barred galaxy. “How did he gather enough energy to take
material form?”

“He and several guardians convinced their charges to convert their infants into energy in one ceremony, where he converted the energy into matter.”

“He has given them access to thought-forms far beyond them. But how did these human females manage to convert their infants into energy, pray tell?”

“By burning them, Great Creator. As sacrifices to those guardians who call themselves the Moloj Coalition”

Coalition, again. The Creator's rage leveled mountains on several planets in a nearby galaxy.

“What more? Is there anything this arrogant guardian of the Tree of Knowledge has not done for them, pray tell?”

“There is one more thing, Great Creator,” reported the messenger: “before shedding his identity as Prometheus, this guardian also appears to have revealed the thought-form of the Phoenix to the same group of human beings.”

“How dare he?! Detain him here at once, in his corporeal form, so that he may feel pain. Prepare a place on the dark side of the highest peak on the earth, where he will be chained in this human shape, each day to relive a visit by this same burning bird, tearing out his liver to feast on it before consuming them both in the flames each nightfall. They shall be reborn from their ashes together, with every dawn, to relive the consuming of his flesh each night. That is my punishment for this guardian who would live as a human man. He shall be human and immortal, lasting all the days of this earth, in torment for his disobedience. Go!” thundered the Ancient Warrior.

As the guardian went to find the unfortunate renegade Tree guardian, the Creator turned his attention back to the problem of lawlessness among the growing human and hybrid human-guardian population.

“As I was saying,” the Creator returned to the supervising guardian, “Tell the Light Bearer that I am amenable to allowing the children of her precious first woman to continue, if she insists, through the family of this Reposo, who seems to be the best of the lot. He is the only one who has found my favor, so if she insists on continuing this experiment, it must be with him. If the young Creatrix agrees, then perhaps my compassion will overcome my judgment. Now go.”

Fin