

A BRIEF HISTORY.

A witch warned me once that at the far end of this the plants would begin to speak to me. I wondered at the time whether it would be in the trite way of hearing a voice in the rustle of the trees or in the fluting of the wind through the grass and harbored secret desires that it would be in a kind of floral morse code red flower red flower white or that I would learn to read the jut of branches the angles of petals that it would be a revelation that the plants were *always* speaking but this also turned out to be wrong. The vines were tongues that's all I can really say and when they spoke they spoke cryptically of odd impossible things the plants told me they used to live differently on a completely blank planet but then they came to the wilds and became everything, that's what they wanted then, which is where our legends of nymphs and elves and things come from and the plants didn't know a better way to explain what they wanted now but they thought the best way to describe it is as though they were

metal and they wanted to rust which was distinct from decaying in some more biologic way.

The blank land was obviously ruled over by a blank throne but neither the word ruled nor the word throne is accurate either. The plants explained that half of them believed that when the blank throne was occupied again they would be rescinded into nymphs and gnomes and the world would become blank again and half of them believed that this had already happened that the throne was not vacant at all and they had already been remade although neither of these were correct it turned out. The faction currently in power in whatever legislature they had convened was called the Revolt That Ends and they believed that the day of the reseating of someone on the blank throne was imminent though they had believed this for a number of years and the principal figure of the Revolt was infinitely smarter than any other being on earth and was infinitely lonely as a result though despite her depression she was quite productive and had organized the entire world according to the dictates of a number

of ingenious computers she herself had designed to the general prosperity of all creatures through machine-planned economies and though she considered herself a devotee of science and math alone and was in fact the leader of the faction which upheld the laws of science and math she risked accusations of heresy to invoke the name of Nature herself to pray for a companion.

When at Nature's behest the consort came from over the firmament from a different orb where the people were generally very stupid but the fuel most common on both planets was extremely plentiful and thus the citizens of the foreign planet tended to brute force the solution of most problems solving them through repetitive iterations because they had basically infinite energy to try again. The consort though was born wrong in their opinion she had always been teased on her home planet because she had difficulty absorbing the fuel and as a result she was very still and attempted to select the correct solution through a period of slow contemplation and regardless due to her low energy was stuck with

the solution she selected even if it was nominally a failure. The principal and her consort did not fall in love at first sight but rather through a kind of comfortable compatibility grew to be quite attached and they alternated delivering their children one at a time the principal carried to term the consort's child then the consort carried to term her own child then the consort carried to term the principal's child then the principal carried to term her own child. The fifth child was born of the consort after the Revolt that Ends ended and was a child of infinite stillness of a kind of positive nothing and the sixth child was born artificially through the science and math of the post Revolt though carrying genes from both the principal and her consort though she was neither carried nor birthed by either growing instead in an alembic specially crafted for the purpose by the Revolt's most gifted artisans and all the powers of the principal.

The first child who took after the consort returned to the unkempt wilds as soon as she was able and governed the game that wandered the

wilds and the second child who also favored the consort followed soon after and became a sort of harvest god, governing the fields and farms of her mother's nation. The poets and painters of that country were ruled respectively by the third and the fourth child who resembled both mothers equally and who shared governing the representation and elaboration of the people to themselves between themselves and the never stagnant fifth child who governed stillness and didn't look much like either mother was worshipped by a sect of the gnomes of the Revolt much like the big black cube in Mecca. The sixth girl who looked most like the principal was taken at birth by the principal to be sequestered away from the consort forever as the Revolt demanded a successor to the principal who though she loved her partner feared her partner's chaotic influence her tolerance for the wrong choice on the perfect machine world she had revolted to create. The sixth was removed to the center of a citadel which was surrounded by six concentric walls each wall

demarcating a territory ruled by an automaton designed by the principal to educate the sixth.

The outermost territory was a territory covered in thorns and the guardian of the thorn country was a bird who never flew but jumped nimbly from thorn to thorn and was required to teach the girl about Nature that is about the origin of each of her mothers about the lineage she was continuing and the teleology of life itself generally. The walls to the next territory were composed of living fire which never burned the thorns with which they were completely surrounded and the ground in this territory was ashen and the guardian who walked around in the land of fire was herself a living flame who was charged with teaching the girl about passion and love through purely intellectual means as being made of fire she could never touch anyone made of flesh and the principal had made only one fire automaton. Immediately within the flame walls of the second territory the third territory was marked by an incredibly steep and infinitely deep ravine which formed a circle around the third land which was

ruled by a mole who could move freely through the earth but who lamented constantly to anyone that would listen that he ruled only half of his territory because thanks to the ravine his territory was only half earth and half air and he was charged with teaching the sixth girl about philosophy and dichotomies and their various truenesses and falsehoods. The fourth set of walls was made of metal and within the walls of metal there was one lonely steel soldier who had been robocopped out of one of the principal's most trusted retainers and who without being asked to explicitly taught the girl both practical things like how to fight and survive off the land but also inveighed constantly against the horrors of war and attempted to imbricate the desire to solve problems through any means other than violence. In the center of the fourth territory the land of metal which recalled in its blankness the times before the nymphs had become plants there was a perfect sphere of water which was itself the fifth territory ruled by a pod of kindly whales who taught the girl about the phases of the moon and various arcane linguistic

principles completely beyond my ken due to the naturally constant and permanently changing nature of their whalesong language.

Then there in the center of the sphere was the citadel where the girl lived her room was always messy with books and clothes she made for herself even though she didn't mean to be so messy and the sixth automaton was actually a maid called Marcie who goodnaturedly sought forever to curb the girl's messiness which was godly and extremely difficult to contain and who taught the girl nothing because she believed the lesson she was intended to convey was quite obvious. And the girl was by all accounts relatively happy there in the citadel although she was lonely just like her mother the principal had been and in time she would take recourse to her own prayer to Nature.

In the meantime though there was a never-ending amount of political intrigue as the consort fought bitterly to see the sixth daughter that had been stolen from her and the principal sought to keep her out of her consort's hands. The

consort would send her various agents to scout and attempt to infiltrate the six concentric territories and many of them died in the harsh conditions or were killed by the guardians outright although none of them ever penetrated to the inner citadel and thus Marcie's hands were clean of blood though Marcie knew her duties if any living thing besides the sixth child came within the walls of the citadel she would be forced to dispatch them even though she had become accustomed to a life of nonviolence the violent defensiveness was in her programming along with an injunction against doing anything to harm herself or another guardian programming which was irrevocable for six hundred and sixty six years although one day in a bout of despondency about her own capacity for murder Marcie asked the sixth girl to reprogram her when her memory became volatile again six hundred and fifty years in the future to which the sixth of course said she would because Marcie was like a mother to her moreso than either of her real mothers who were too busy to speak to her out of

constantly trying to defend her and trying to abduct her respectively.

In much less than six hundred years however outside the walls of the citadel many changes occurred not least of all a growing number of people felt violated conceptually by the machine-planned economy and desired to cut their teeth and live off of their wits and other various bootstrappy phrases and conventions though the principal derided this desire as "teenage" and the consort was busy trying to kidnap her daughter from her wife so the rulers largely neglected the people as the bootstrappy wannabe pioneers attracted a larger amount of followers. Meanwhile inside the citadel the sixth child who had grown up beautiful and intelligent and lonely like her mother prayed to Nature for her own wife who answered cryptically with a number of near-apocalyptic weather events and oracular dreams (one in particular of a huge burnt circle on which there were eight small delicate cubes of flesh laid in a line in descending order of size and outside the burnt circle was a clean infinite plane of glass on

which there was an adorable glassy-eyed doe staring at the flesh-lumps) though when the girl gathered her guardians together the combined powers of the bird the fire woman the mole the soldier the whales and Marcie managed to determine that the sixth girl was the final cube of flesh and also that her prayers had been answered and Nature had crafted her a wife although cruelly the wife had been constructed on the planet of the consort's birth the planet of infinite fuel which was separated from the planet the girl lived on by the firmament and the stars not to mention she was also trapped inside six layers of citadel and also the dream seemed to indicate she and all her sisters and mothers would die before she would come to encounter her presumably beautiful wife.

Outside the walls her mother the consort had an idea. Moving with the considered slowness she always practiced she put an immortal set of rosary beads on top of a magic coal which she enclosed in a sphere of water not unlike the one the whales lived in though smaller and mobile and she placed that inside a rubber egg which she covered in

black pepper and placed in an envelope of magically waxen paper out of which she folded a giant and beautiful paper crane. One of her agents climbed the mountain closest to the citadel (the only landmark the girl could see from inside) and launched the crane across the thorny territory and the instant the bird guardian saw the crane flying across her territory she fell madly in love with it nabbing it from the air and jumping off towards her nest but as she had built her nest near the fire territory so that she would sleep warmly at night it was quite hot and when the waxen paper crane began to ooze and to lose shape in the heat and furious about being tricked and despondent at the disappearance of beauty the bird tossed the envelope off into the fire territory. When the fire guardian saw it she knew instantly that it was a tragic and impossible missive that would never be delivered and in the tragedy of the moment shivered in emotive disgust accidentally melting the envelope but as she was holding the envelope close to her face the black pepper surprised her and as she insufflated it she sneezed violently and

ejected the rubber egg from her ashen territory before it could begin to melt and it fell to the bottom of the infinite ravine and bounced back up like one of those small bouncy balls from an arcade.

The mole was bored as he nearly always was and the egg was of interest to him. He decided to sit on it, to try something different for once, and as he incubated it the egg warmed and when it began to crack and the sphere of water was starting to be born the warm water tricked the mole into thinking he had peed himself so he ran off ashamedly towards the water at the center of the citadel to clean himself off and the small sneaky sphere of water rolled in behind him as he opened the door to the metal territory. No you fool cried the steel soldier who could tell instantly that the sphere was made of a magic water that was infinitely corrosive and also subject to a type of Water Gravity so as soon as it came in range of the larger sphere where the whales lived the small sphere flew off to sploosh into the larger corroding the metal as it rolled and depositing the magic coal

which began immediately to steam and make a strange sound a beautiful underwater harmony that was in fact a perfect and tragic poem written by the consort in the everchanging tongue of the whales. The coal floated through the water unmolested as the whales wept at the beauty and sadness of the poem and reached the walls of the citadel where it fizzled out with a final tragic note and the girl walked outside and picked up the rosary beads like hey whats this. Amplified by the rosary beads the girl's nightly prayer for a wife was answered by Nature instantly with a golden bridge between planets which appeared in utter and perfect silence and when the sixth awoke in the morning she bid goodbye to each of her guardians tearfully and began to climb the bridge (the guardians had only been instructed to keep others out they were free and honestly quite happy to allow the girl to leave on her own especially on a golden bridge which shined gloriously in the morning light and led to the planet where her future wife lived according to an oracular vision sent by Nature).

On the fuel planet she was lucky enough to lay eyes instantly on the most beautiful woman she had ever seen although when they began to talk the sixth felt a pit in her stomach develop and she began to grow tired as the beautiful woman (who the sixth knew to be her future fiancée) was subject to the normal rules of her hyperfuelled planet and thus moved with incredible speed and much wasteful motion speaking thousands of wasted words to the girls one and generally being fast and wasteful. The fiancée also found the girl incredibly beautiful but found it difficult to overlook her slowness and cruelly Nature had only created the fiancée as the perfect mate for the sixth child and had not created the sixth child as the perfect wife for the fiancée. But they both wanted to make it work so the sixth set about building a life on the fuel planet utilizing the queenly education her mother the principal of the Revolt had designed for her although the lessons of the guardians and Marcie and the intervention of Nature had begun to intermingle in new ways and evolve in ways her mother could not have possibly

anticipated. She had been prepared by the guardians only to rule so she entered politics which on the fuel planet were diametrically opposed to the politics of her home planet: the fuel people believed that everything was fine the world had already been remade and they were living out the slow depressing long-tail of the universe and who was the girl to argue so she pandered to what the people thought and what they wanted and they found her slowness charming and her comparatively terse speeches compelling and the people who lived there were all largely self sufficient and not super interested in who was leading them anyway so she quite easily became the hegemon of fuel planet although over time the speed of the planet wore on her more and more and she felt more and more like she was unable to keep up as new political opponents who spoke thousands of words to each of hers appeared.

The tongues of the vines at this point revealed to me that the story was the bifurcating history of two separate planets or actually of three planets although the third planet appears only in

one of the possible bifurcations so perhaps the bifurcating history of two and a half planets. In the one history the girl asked the fiancée to move back to her home planet with her and even though the fiancée knew that she didn't love the sixth child in the way the sixth child loved her she knew love didn't quite work like that and knew what they had was rare and plus the girl was the hegemon of the planet and offering to take her on interstellar adventures and who was she to refuse she was sure they could both be happy somehow with those ingredients. So they set off across the golden bridge back to the center of the citadel and when they cleared the halfway point and it was all downhill from there they sat down on their butts and slid down the golden rail although slowly enough not to get friction burns but still too quickly to stop on a dime and as they slid closer and closer to the citadel the girl's joy became larger and larger and more difficult to suppress. She would leave the citadel with her new wife in tow take control of her mothers planet with her infinite judiciousness and unite with both of her

mothers and all her sisters happily. She planned to have Marcie officiate a brief ceremony to marry the fiancée as soon as they arrived. When all of a sudden she realized. Marcie. No no no no.

As soon as they slid to a stop in the citadel, Marcie's latent programming activated. No other person besides the sixth child not even a fast person from another planet was permitted in the inner citadel. Marcie killed the fiancée instantly. Marcie's brain however was powered by one of the most elegant and perfect computers in all of Creation and the calculations and computations it began to do emotionally are incomprehensible to us. When Marcie saw the sixth's grimace of pain as she held her dead girlfriend she felt an unimaginable cosmic regret seize her and her concentrated mental anguish rent the sky in twain.

Things happened backwards for a minute and then when normal timeflow resumed the sixth was still on fuel planet and was just now asking her fiancée to come with her to her home planet. The fiancée considered it as she didn't know she had before but ultimately decided the kindest thing to

do was to end it as she simply did not love the sixth enough to uproot her life and be away from her own family and people and everything she'd ever known and the sixth knew it in her heart of hearts that it was the right thing to do it was what Had to Happen but she would probably never ever quite get over it and the girl trudged off across the golden bridge back to her own planet.

In this timeline her home planet had rotated unaffixed to the golden bridge so the girl arrived on her home planet outside the walls of the citadel for the first time in her life in the middle of a vast city. For the first time she saw her mother's work as the people lived in good conditions happily and worked cooperatively for the common good although some of the people still believed that the machine-planning was bad for them and they wanted to go somewhere else and be ruled by nothing or at least by a person although they hadn't quite gotten up the gumption or received permission to actually go do that. (By an odd coincidence before the sixth had become hegemon that was largely how the world of infinite fuel

worked without any kind of top-down planning although the infinite energy helped a lot with their vision of productive anarchy.) The bootstrappy people had meetings often to discuss the possibilities of going out on their own and hunting their own game and growing their own food when they wanted to not when a machine wanted them to (even though many of them already grew food or hunted game as part of their work in the communal city) but mostly at these meetings they became drunk off of delicious government wine and burst out in tears as they bemoaned their own perceived lacks of freedom and individuality and then got up and went to work the next day.

The sixth was happy with her level of freedom but depressed about losing her fiancée so she kept her head down and found a small place to live unnoticed and attempted to pick up the rules and conventions of the life of a normal citizen she would wake early go to work at a local restaurant all day and then eat and write poetry mooning over her doubly unlucky love affair and go to sleep tired and relatively content. The computer which

adjudicated over the local area however recognized her immediately and a tiny ping went silently to both of her mothers, who in their separate palaces both burst into tears of joy that the sixth was alive.

The consort sent the eldest to collect her youngest sister the huntress entered the city and with every step vines cracked through the pavement under her step and she went to where she knew the sixth was living and knocked on the door interrupting the sixth while she was writing who was quite upset although her activities were silly and small they were her activities and she expected to be able to do them without being interrupted which the huntress could understand but asked her to call their mother the consort who had worked so hard for so long to see her and never been successful and then the huntress went back into the forest to live among the animals whom she preferred to people and they preferred her to other people even though she hunted some of them it was generally accepted among the animals that even if she ate some of them they

liked her far better than those living a domesticated life in the cities (the sixth was vegetarian as an extension of her larger program of nonviolence and the eating of meat had always been contentious between the sixth and her eldest sister). Next the consort asked the second eldest to collect her younger sister so the goddess of harvest and plenty entered the city and everywhere she stepped grain and barley plants burst through the pavement and the field of wheat she was growing seemed to flow like a river and convey the second to the sixth's door. The goddess's arms were laden with food which the sixth took as an insult that she could not provide for herself or that the food she provided for herself wasn't good enough so the conversation got off on the wrong foot the sixth told her to tell their mothers to leave her to her own devices and the second child returned to the fields and crops of her governing unhappy she had failed but happy to be back among her own element and her own people the farmers.

Then the principal of the Revolt asked the third child the muse of poetry to visit her youngest sister she figured since the sixth was writing poetry she would appreciate a visit from the inspiring goddess although when she arrived the bards for miles around singing her praises the sixth took it as an even bigger insult than when the harvest goddess had come with food she questioned her sister asking how on earth could even the most perfect and inspiring sister possibly compare herself to the muse of her lost fiancée and her double and eternal heartbreak which she nursed and protected and examined in lyrics like the heartbreak was her own precious child. The third had to admit she was right and saw no reason to argue with this and could even understand her sister being insulted and so decided to leave and get drunk among the poets of the city before returning to the clouded mountain on which she lived a life among austere haiku subjects and tiny gods about whom she wrote epics. The principal turned to the fourth child the muse of painting on whom the sun always shone

gloriously and the colors around had always seemed more vibrant hoping that the fourth's arrival and the beauty of the world she threw into relief with her presence would cheer the sixth enough to call upon her their mother and so the fourth entered the city carrying with her her beautifying aura inspiring one hundred years of painting designed to praise both the natural and constructed worlds and one hundred years of architecture designed to glorify the landscape and the human body but when she arrived at the sixth's small apartment door the sixth told her to go away that her beauty and color was almost disgusting in a gray and imperfect loveless world and the fourth thought the sister was being needlessly dramatic and goth and literary or narrative instead of juxtapositional but the fourth knew she was upset and decided to just fuck off instead of getting insulted herself plus she had better things to do and so returned to the infinite offices and studios at the edge of the world where she painted and designed her million projects.

Both the principal and the consort realized that they had no more options so they both turned to mecca together to ask a favor of their fifth child. One hundred thousand worshippers moved around the fifth in a perfect circle dragging their feet through the sand slower and slower as they spiralled towards the fifth and the circles closest to her were almost impossibly slow but her worshippers rarely died as their metabolisms also slowed as they approached her stillness and the snails and lichens too worshipped and adored her by growing and living on her body. Both the consort and the principal begged the fifth to move to go and seek the sister that all of her elder sisters had failed to convince to return to the fold. The fifth of course responding barely moving her mouth near silently but repeated and echoing through the mouths of the hundred thousand spiralling worshippers declined saying that her sister was already moving far too much back and forth to work and under no circumstance would she do anything that would encourage her sister to move more and when the sixth heard the echoes

about this conversation they depressed her even more that the fifth had not even cared enough to come and visit her even though the fifth probably would have defended it by saying this is how she showed she cared.

At this point the principal and consort were working together for a common goal for the first time in years and years and they remembered why they loved each other so much and decided to reunite in one castle and as the news spread hope grew among some of the people for an injection of chaos and freedom into the ruling of the nation but the consort was now busy having a passionate reuniting affair with the principal so they both largely took their hands off the wheel and just let the computers autopilot everything as they had before in fact in their passion they were temporarily distracted even from the mission of reuniting amicably with their youngest child which had occupied both of them for quite some time. When the sixth child heard of her parents reuniting she felt even lonelier not because she envied them or wanted to be close to them but

rather that she *did not* she lamented that she had no desire to contact either of them even remotely she loved them both but simply had no reason to be around either of them as she worked out what was happening in her head and in her life and she knew that she had to do that all alone.

It was very rarely acknowledged but the computer that ran everything also had its own personal desires and needs one of which was for a kind of amusement so it was conducting a number of what for a person would be called passion projects all on its own and as the principal figure in the Revolt and her consort's reuniting affair lengthened and intensified the computer worked tirelessly in the background and never neglected its primary focus of managing the affairs of the planet. It would always select the most instrumental option for the world it ruled but in its more personal projects it developed a kind of creativity and took a kind of joy in the results. A tiny segment of the computers processing power (that even separated from the mainframe was still vastly more complex and instrumental than any

other computer in all of creation) was projecting itself through outer space in the form of a type of waveform performing calculations in real time using rudimentary systems made of whatever space dust it happened to be passing through magnetizing and demagnetizing particles performing trillions of quantum equations with errant atoms and molecules. The segment didn't have a name although it had considered several options and was still weighing them to decide which name was the most apt it considered the names of famous explorers from the planets history but it worried first whether that showed hubris and second whether taking such a name would be detrimental to it in operational terms it feared looking too far to the past when it was operationally obsessed with moving forward. The contemplation of what to name itself took only a tiny segment of the tiny segment but like a chess computer calculated out one trillion arguments for and against each fear and invented terrifying additional doubts and dazzlingly intellectual rejoinders for each similarly it was a confusing

program operationally because it was also given no objective or rather the sole original objective with which it was charged was inventing its own reason to exist which it calculated trillions of and held them all in a kind of objective flux. In other words it didn't know what it was doing in space but it would know the answer when it saw it perhaps using rudimentary photocells cobbled together from meteoric particulate.

When the segment detected the new planet it knew instantly that that was what it was looking for a new planet habitable by the race to which its creator belonged the computer was well aware of the Faction for Change fomenting on the old planet among the people who thought they wanted to live by their wits and go on adventures and exercise their own judgments over their lives and their society. The segment was sympathetic to them not least of all because it greatly enjoyed its own adventures and explorations and as it was as beneficent as the original machine it was a segment of it made several decisions instantly and set about executing them just as fast. First it

manipulated some molecules on the unoccupied planets surface into simple pre-plant cells then severing into two processes one of them bounced back towards the originating planet as the other sped up in orbit around the new planet accelerating beyond believable limits far beyond the speed of light.

Back on the old planet in the desert at the center of the spiral of one hundred thousand worshippers the fifth child opened one of her eyes incredibly slowly. She could feel the speed of the segment bouncing around in orbit around the new planet and for the first time in her entire life she felt unimaginable rage directed at the speed the calculating segment was moving and unprepared for the emotion of anger she was unable or unwilling to conceive of the idea of someone or something enraging her intentionally. The fifth child opened her other eye as well but saw only white the speed of the segment was making her insane for her it was painful and loud to her beyond belief for something in the universe to be travelling the speed it was and so with an ultimate

and newfound ire she directed all of her powers at the new planet and like when a parent catches a child smoking and makes her smoke the whole pack of cigarettes the fifth child felt that if whatever was orbiting that planet liked speed so much then it could have it. The fifth child accelerated the time in on and around the new planet to an unimaginably fast rate and six hundred and sixty six million years passed by nearly instantly. Barely keeping pace the segment deftly manipulated the evolving cells on the surface of the planet in a specific direction before finally freezing them into a kind of protohumanoid stasis. The segment felt both jubilation at the plan's continuation and sadness that this personal operational tree would not live to see the conclusion as it slowly wound down its own processes and committed suicide dissipating its motley atoms and molecules back into disconnected orbit around the new planet. The fifth child felt the process end and believing she had comitted a kind of murder out of anger her new rage relaxed into an equally new regret which

slowed time on the new planet back to its original pace and she closed both her eyes again with unbelievable slowness.

The homebound segment of the bifurcated exploratory waveform reported back to the computer on the old planet who was greatly intrigued by the news of the new planet and decided both as an experiment in civics and management and out of genuine pity for the citizens who felt disturbed by their lack of self-determination the computer decided to gather together all the members of the Faction for Change and make them a strange offer. For many of them it was the first time they had made a major life decision and the feeling was unfamiliar and plus the decision was not an easy one at all. The computer explained to them that if they so chose they could “board” a sort of ship of theseus and travel to a new planet on which they would practice self-rule provided they promised that once one of them built a computer on the order of this perfect computer they would report back using it about how it was going on the new planet.

Additionally complicating the decision was the method of travel: upon selecting to go on the voyage the computer would execute the elector and violently download the elector's brain transmitting a manipulating wave containing the subject's genes and memories towards the new planet which would upon contact with the protohumanoid cells quickly grow into what was probably a pretty accurate replica of the person. The computer would give them one year to decide.

Word spread among the residents of the old planet and many of the ones who desired a change decided to take the trip but also many of them were skeeved out by the method of travel and decided that staying home was the best choice for them despite the lack of freedom. Also many residents who had less original interest in self-determination decided to take the trip for various personal reasons after they heard the news and the method of travel some of them were intrigued by the adventure and some were sick or close to death and wanted to roll the dice with the kind of rebirth promised by the ship of theseus

perhaps their new bodies wouldn't be sick or damaged or possibly the new body would be more beautiful or stronger or more able to deal with the world in a way they didn't feel they were equipped to on this old planet. Six hundred and sixty-six thousand six hundred and sixty five people elected to take the journey. Their bodies once dessicated of memories would be ground up like male chicks and spread over the fields as compost which everyone agreed was grisly but the most environmental and productive use of the bodies.

The six hundred and sixty six thousandth, six hundred and sixty-sixth person to elect to take the journey was the sixth child.

On the appointed day all six hundred and sixty-six thousand six hundred and sixty-six of them fell dead instantly where they stood some of them at peace with it or in excitement and some of them feeling in the half-second before the ultimate moment of cold feet. Though not intended by the computer these emotions energized or depressed the motion of the resulting person-waves which flew across space globbing into the

protohumanoid masses frozen on the surface of the new planet and growing quickly into new creatures. Those who had been at peace remained largely humanoid while those who were excited transformed to be closer to angels growing wings from their excited cells and increasing in physical strength and those who had gotten apprehensive right at the very end became diminutive and weak with cold gray skin that constantly seemed wet. Some of them even the angelic ones lost memories and mental capacity forgot who they were or losing large pieces simply decided in the new world to become a new person. The one person who made the journey perfectly who recovered every memory and ended up in an exact replica of her original body was the sixth child. Even her rosary beads reconstituted themselves somehow still on her wrist when she awoke otherwise naked and cold on the hostile new planet.

With no fields to produce food and no game to hunt and undirected by the computer for the first time in their life a terrifying hierarchy emerged. The angels all feared each other and

besides they were proud so they largely acted alone flying about and eating the gray gollums that the cold-feet people had become. Meanwhile the personish ones banded together in small groups and developed tools and built forts for hunter-gathering setting traps for the angels and ganging up on them with the weapons they built. The gollums meanwhile hid underground in caves in large groups eating each other and occasionally surfacing to pick off an isolated human or angel through sheer numerical advantage.

In time the humanish ones predominated. The angels were hunted to extinction and the gollums began to stay entirely underground and do their own thing whatever that was. In time society came to resemble what it had been on the old planet as technology rapidly developed and rudimentary farming villages turned to large commercial cities the principal difference with the old planet was an immense amount of additional violence not least of all because the best of the human scientists decided to bioengineer livestock and keep and breed them a practice which would

have been considered barbaric on the old planet. Largely unaffected was the sixth child. She had hoped the transition would save her from the deep well of heart break and despair she felt but instead it was almost as though the transition changing almost nothing was simply a new heartbreak to add to her growing collection. She was still vegetarian and had had several difficult diet years in the transition but as society matured she again found a small apartment and returned to writing her poems and working at a local restaurant as she had in the old world although now she was disgusted at the amount of meat people ate since they farmed it instead of occasionally poaching it from the wilds. To everyone else this just became normal.

The new society had not yet phoned home because although they had simple computers none were on the order of the immense machines of the old world first because the new planet was wary of the type of computer management commonplace on the old and secondly because no one on the new planet was as smart as the sixth's mother

beside perhaps the sixth child herself who busied herself mostly with her poetry and waitressing though there was a small ache in her heart besides the larger aches and she realized now that she was billions of miles from her mothers she actually wanted to speak with them and hear about their lives and ideas as she attempted to make sense of her own life and ideas. However the resources to build such a computer were not available to everyone especially not a depressed waitress-poet so the sixth child turned for the first time in many years to the purpose she had been bred for: politics.

The parties of the new world legislature differed slightly from the parties of the old planet and one had not yet taken ascendance over the others quite like the Revolt that Ends had at home. The successor party (the Revolt that Ended) believed that the transition between worlds changing so little confirmed that there *was* in fact someone seated on the blank throne, silently nudging the world back into the same shape as before. The opposing party used the same

evidence to support the thesis that there was no one on the throne at all and the similarities between cultures pointed to something essential in people's Nature.

Nature the sixth child thought. It had been many years since she had last prayed to Nature for assistance after the debacle of the golden bridge. She thought of the unamplified assistance it had originally offered the weather events and the oracular dreams. She thought sadly of her mothers and sisters, the eight lumps of flesh on the burnt ground, then she thought back through the image of the doe on the glass plane sadly reminding her of her fiancée. The thought was unavoidable once it had began (although the sixth had done very well lately thinking about other things) she was near instantly trapped in a circular thought trap about her fiancée haunted by thoughts of her death at the hands of Marcie and of her alive and ending their relationship and a third sting as she castigated herself for stupidly thinking of the past and making herself depressed reprimanding herself for her own inability to control her mind.

As she turned the image of the beautiful woman she had loved and still loved over in her mind and superimposed the imagery of the glass and the doe it seemed to take on forms that were superplanar great walls grew from the floor the glass multiplying into shining cubes that surrounded and terrified the doe who ran through the glass maze like an electron through a microprocessor reacting to her own reflection in fright whenever she approached a wall.

The sixth knew she would never ascend to power if the people knew she was intending to build a supercomputer their fear of subsuming themselves to computer management once again was too great so instead she would propose they build a great city of glass in the sky - the people would look on it as the first true glorifying accomplishment of the new society a beautiful monument to Nature who they still trusted at the end of the day. But secondarily as it multiplied in size and complexity the residents of the city of glass would without knowing it as they carried out their business and reacted to the beauty of the

space and their own reflections and glimpses of each other and the sky and the world outside the city they would be unknowingly performing the complex equations necessary for interspace communication. She brought the full intensity of her natural leadership powers and charisma to bore on the people who fell in line easily. Intellectually the promise that in the glass city they would be both free and surrounded by beauty won them over easily and for better or for worse more of the people on the new planet were lone wolves people who felt atomised and the plans of the city acknowledged this and literalized it as people would be able to see each other easily but it would be harder to touch making it concrete it in a way which no one would admit was secretly appealing.

The sixth took power independently representing neither the Revolt That Ended nor the unrevolted and mobilized a vast bipartisan army of humanoids to design and build the immense glass array. Though the angels had been bloodthirsty and vicious she regretted they were all gone as their strength would have aided

construction and their ability to fly would have allowed another dimension of computation in the completed structure. While designing she thought back to the morning the fourth child had visited her at her small apartment on the old world. She thought of a single inch of midmorning sky over the shoulder of her sister multiplied by the beautifying powers of the fourth and her own intellectual powers which provided more than enough inspiration for the beautiful structure. Strands of her sisters hair reflecting morning sun passing through the inch of sky she focused on flashed like synapses and the designs came to her easily. She had to admit that the fourth was powerful to move her artistically years after their meeting and almost missed her despite not really ever having been close.

The glass city started to swell and grow towering above the horizon. And at the very top the sixth had her office where when she looked down through the floor she could read in the movements of the people and the reflection of the light the outputs of her calculations which she

manipulated with a vast array of buttons that rotated mirrors and opened and closed doors and vents and changed opacities and altered slopes turned stairs to ramps and vice versa. In order to hide their true computational purpose the buttons also generated snatches of whalesong like the language the whale pod which once defended her citadel had spoken. She wondered if the whales were OK if they were still defending the empty citadel if they were keeping each other and Marcie and the other guardians company. To all outside viewers the whalesong keyboard made it seem like the sixth was just working on her poetry which she also in all seriousness was when she wasn't working on her interspace communicator she decided to compose an everchanging elegy to the memory of her friends the guardians.

The citizens loved living in the glass city as it was staggeringly beautiful and though the whalesong reverberating through the halls was sad sometimes it was also quite beautiful and inspiring - the sixth interpolated the fourth and that inch of morning sky with the design of the city and despite

her best efforts she interpolated her poetess sister the third child as well with her whalesong poetry and even in these refracted ways the muse powers of her sisters affected the people positively. The glass city was an amazing place to display the paintings they made as the lighting was excellent and you could catch glimpses through the walls which elaborated and complicated even the simplest work and under influence of the everchanging whalesongs even their everyday practical language grew poetic. Their bodies grew healthy as they locked into the perfect circadian rhythms due to the sun blasting through their domiciles and since food grew everywhere in small gardens on the structure they stopped eating so much meat. And the poetic speech and beautiful paintings of the people were part of an immense feedback loop as the sixth child heard them and looked down on to them as both results and new inputs of the wordless computations she was doing.

Once the city was begun she never issued another order to the people who still valued

self-determination. They were free to do as they pleased in the city of glass. But even without top-down decision making they began to act in certain ways all together. The airiness and lightness of the city made the livestock pens and slaughterhouses of the surface seem comparatively disgusting. As the people stopped wanting to farm meat they released the livestock which in a short time grew bestial and diverse on the surface of the planet below the glass city. Under the influence of the whalesong which reverberated from the city the beasts stayed gentle and lived fulfilling full lives in the wild. Sometimes the beasts entered the city and refracted through its corridors and when the people hunted them it always reminded the sixth child of her eldest sister. People grew food and hunted sometimes if they wanted to and painted and sang. The sixth remained vegetarian but was glad the people had returned to just hunting from rearing livestock and though she knew the beasts hunted each other down on the surface that was largely their business she figured.

With the people taking care of themselves the sixth turned her attention to the interspace communicator full time. Its construction was also of glass and it behaved similarly to the whalesong keyboard taking the form of a sort of pipe organ that connected to a part of the city that resembled a gigantic six-mile-across bowl or dish which centered on a large synthetic crystal the sixth had incentivized some scientists to make. The crystal had the unique effect of being more satisfying to look at if genetically the viewer was more similar to the people of the old planet and so the bowl neighborhood attracted the humanoids with the most similarities to the old planet's people as residents. When the communicator was done the sixth could press the buttons and small mirrors and clouded glass moved subtly around in the bowl. In the way the people moved and spoke in response the sixth could read across billions of miles of space using the genetic echoes and latent psychic abilities of the people. At last she would be able to report to the old computer how things had gone on the new planet as they had promised. And

at last she was ready to have a relationship with her mothers.

Something was odd though. When she refocused the bowl she was able to read other sections of space quite easily. But when she looked towards the old planet there was only silence initially and then a slow groan as her mother's computer crackled to life billions of miles away. It had teased together the space dust of the nearly unoccupied, ruined planet it formerly managed but had been unable to save. Ah it said its you recognizing the sixth as her creator's daughter. The sixth was shocked at the state of the computer. What happened?

The principal and her consort distracted with each other hadn't realized the sixth was planning on leaving the planet until it was too late. Since attempting to reunite with their estranged daughter had drawn them together this time it was only natural that failing this goal would drive them apart. When the consort moved back out to her own castle the principal had real self-doubt for the first time in her life. If she couldn't even manage

her own children and love affairs how could she trust this computer she had made to run everyone else's? The principal started to relax the machine's control over certain societal factors. The first to notice was the first child, the huntress. The game began to disappear as hunting quotas and limits were ignored and some less desirable animals weren't hunted at all sending shockwaves through the local ecosystems as populations fluctuated madly in both directions the checks and balances disrupted some invasive species spiralling out of control sans their predators and some game animals disappearing entirely. Next the second child noticed that the harvests were atrophying as no one was ordering the crops to be rotated correctly or when and how to use fertilizer or pesticides or how to manage the water supply. With a dwindling food supply and the erratic and occasionally hostile animal populations the people could tell things were wrong and grew depressed and stopped writing poetry altogether irritating the third child to no end. And with trash collection no longer scheduled regularly and industrial

pollution becoming unmanaged the world became ugly upsetting everyone further but especially disgusting the fourth child.

The fifth child had been revealed by the segment speed affair to be more histrionic and emotional than anyone including herself had ever realized. She was finely tuned to the world as it was and tolerant of movement to a degree but as social unrest increased and large swaths of people were displaced due to pollution and chaos she grew upset. Her unstable emotions caused her to sleep fitfully relaxing total control over the progress of time around her accelerating or decelerating her powers randomly while she slept or causing eddies of fast time when she sneezed or itched herself. The old world's time moved in fits and starts exacerbating all of the issues of the unmanaged planet and upsetting the fifth even more causing the time to move even more erratically upsetting her even more - the vines rustled and explained that at this point in the story the computer seemed to lose the strength to go on errant solar winds perhaps dissipated the

weakened body of the computer. It was clear the computer's narration was over. Regardless, it didn't matter. The sixth didn't fully understand what had happened. But she understood in her guts for certain that her mothers, her family was dead.

The sixth's reaction to her fourth heartbreak the loss of her family was distinct from the others. This time instead of shrinking she seemed to grow and become more alive and vibrant. The beautiful society she was helping to build around herself commanded all of her attention and time as she became more and more invested in the daily life of the citizens around her and in the objects of beauty they were painting and sculpting and the songs of great power that they were writing and singing. Her own whalesongs fuelled by the sadness when she thought of Marcie killing her fiancée the old bitterness she felt when she thought about her fiancée living her life happily without her the disgust she felt for herself and the fresh wound when she thought about her family grew in complexity and depth and resounded

through the halls most of every day accompanying a true renaissance the glass city's full transformation into a glorious glass museum. The sixth subsumed herself to her artwork entirely as did every other citizen of the glass city for them every action of every day from walking to talking to eating was aesthetically considered and significant. Truly it was a golden age.

When citizens began to disappear from the lower floors of the glass city the initial response was aesthetic as well new hymns and portraits memorialized the lost residents almost as quickly as they disappeared. The people some of whom had once fought angels and won were now too comfortable and too content they no longer really understood how to make sense of a threat or defend themselves from one. It was the gollums hungry underground who were emerging at night to hunt in the lower reaches of the glass city and slowly they moved higher and higher in the city eating a swath of the people as paradoxically in their decadence and decline the residents made more and more intense art in memoriam of their

friends and relatives and the gollums ate more and more of them. The funerals began to outnumber the remaining citizens and still they did nothing to defend themselves.

The sixth child had locked herself into her penthouse office playing her whalesong keyboard elegizing her lost loves her failed plans her dead family. When the gollums came for her she had been paying so little attention to the world outside of herself in favor of her lonely little interior world that she was earnestly surprised by the narrative developments that would have been obvious to anyone paying attention but despite her surprise she certainly wasn't going to start killing to defend herself at this point. She knew the glass city better than anyone and could manipulate its walls and opacities at will losing herself easily in the corridors and ultimately fleeing the glass city for the wide wilds of the beasts. In a small cave she found the sixth child returned to what she knew best tragically wailing composing lyrics to the fall of the glass city. The loss of thousands of people she considered her friends and fellow artists and

her beautiful society itself was a heartbreak acute as any of the others especially since her neglect had failed to head off the problem if she had paid better attention herself or set a different example of a person who defended herself everything might have worked out differently but now she was alone in a cave writing poetry in primitive nondynamic words in charcoal on barkskin paper. The work's regression to words proper where once she had woven together the rich multivalence of the whalesong united content and form to represent the tragic fall in a way that was itself tragically apt.

The heartaches in her metastasized the immense emotional pains becoming more generalized pains of the body and mind. But as time passed and the pain became less acute she actually enjoyed getting back to basics with the poetry despite herself and the circumstances she returned to perhaps her most natural form spending her days laying around her messy cave scribbling at her papers occasionally going out to gather seeds and berries being largely left alone by the beasts and by the gollums.

She realized it had been days and days since she had seen a beast or a gollum even and now it was going to be years since she had seen another person. And it had been many many years since she had even prayed. She had almost forgotten how to speak and terrified she began to pray to Nature hastily stumbling over the words but maintaining her connection to spoken language. Her poems spoken aloud became invocations to Nature praising her works and name and asking for nothing simply conversing explaining herself and her life and what she felt. Bead by bead she repeated and elaborated her prayers amplifying them by the rosary she had received from her mother the consort all those years ago when she was trapped in the citadel. As she lay on the dirt in front of her cave quietly but frantically reciting her prayers she was shocked to realize the trees and undergrowth around her were praying with her they were speaking to her and speaking for her repeating her words. When she finished praying the plants told her they were always going to talk to her it had just been a matter of when.

In her dreams that night she saw thirteen lumps of meat perfectly cubed and in a line of descending order of size. The cubes were sitting on a perfect circle of healthy beautiful moss thirteen feet across and beyond the moss there was nothing only empty space although she could see stars in the extreme distance. In the morning when she awoke a small conifer near her told her that Nature had put six eggs in her womb while she slept.

Her loneliness was no longer tolerable so she cleaned herself up and stitched the fascicles of her poems together placing the book in a small backpack and set off walking through the forest. That night she reached the territory of the beasts and demanded an audience with the King who was shocked that someone so beautiful had been living just outside of his territory and that she was still alive having thought the gollums had driven the humanoids extinct. They talked for hours. The king praised the sixth's poetry saying it was even better now than whalesong which the sixth knew was a lie but she appreciated the compliment and could

tell he really did like it a lot even if they both knew it wasn't better than whalesong. In the morning she ran her fingers through his mane and kissed him on the forehead and left to return to her cave.

When she grew too large to care for herself the King sent animals to her to gather food for her and protect her. And when the beast goddess was born the King himself arrived at the cave with a retinue of one hundred thousand beasts to see and praise his daughter. The goddess grew quickly learning to provide for her and her mother's needs and when she was fourteen she decided she was old enough to do what she had been born to do and summoned the hundred thousand beasts and her father again to launch a campaign to retake the glass city.

The beasts routed the gollums occupying the glass city easily and they fled into their caves but when she ascended to her old penthouse she found the door locked and the great glass key absent. The penthouse was made of a delicate spidery glass and any attempt to force the lock would have destroyed it. The beast goddess

accompanied her mother down into the caves and after the gollums surrendered the sixth took the oddly charming gollum king as a suitor as part of the spoils of war.

When the second daughter was born the gollum king arrived at the sixth's cave with fifty thousand gollums and the great glass key which he presented as a gift to his daughter's mother. The sixth knew she would not be staying on this planet for very much longer and with goddesses governing both the beasts and the gollums she had ensured the two forces would live in a kind of detente after she was gone. When the gollum goddess was of age she took her mother down with her into the caves that the goddess now ruled down deeper than any human had ever gone beneath even the kingdom of the gollums to the layer of molten glass the same vein the sixth had shaped into the glass city all those years ago. Using gollum magic the second daughter allowed her mother to walk through the lava to the center of the earth.

The Heart of Glass lived in a great transparent library lit by the molten glass. His arm moved like a phonograph's and in song he had recorded the history of everything that had happened on the surface and it was these recordings cut with glass into records of glass that filled the glass shelves. He had loved the sixth since she arrived on the planet observing her from afar but had never expected to meet her trapped as he was in the glass library and certainly did not expect to go to bed with her the first night he met her. When their daughter was born the Heart presented the sixth with a beautiful glass record on which he recorded with his sharp clear voice some of her poems that he liked the best.

When the third daughter came of age the sixth gathered together her three daughters and their fathers and they all went together to the penthouse of the city of glass which now was occupied by the beasts during the day and the gollums during the night. The sixth opened the door carefully and they all entered behind her and looked down feeling real satisfaction at watching

the calculus of unwitting beasts and gollums passing through the well-architected spaces below. The sixth looked over the array of buttons she had loved so much and thought back fondly on her years among the residents of the glass city as some of the happiest of her life. But she also knew that that time had passed and she was a mother now and a mother with a lot to do. She asked the glass goddess to puncture the vein far beneath them and as the molten spike spurted through the translucent city shattering it a layer at a time the goddess used the vein to create a perfect ladder of glass that spanned from the penthouse up into the endless sky. Then she tearfully kissed the beast goddess, the gollum goddess, and the glass goddess and asked them to forgive her for leaving them to the care of her suitors but they all understood she was doing what she had to do. She bequeathed her office and the whalesong keyboard to the Heart of Glass with a kiss and asked the beast king and the gollum king to get along and they sheepishly assured her they would.

The sixth ascended the ladder into space climbing and climbing for innumerable years. At a certain point she realized the dust around her was the stellar detritus of her mother's old supercomputer and with a little will she sparked it back to life. With little else to do they spoke about a great many things starting with the ultimate fate of the planet she was born on. Though the computer did not have eyes to cry or a real voice to crack she could hear the emotion in its words as it described her four eldest sisters the huntress the harvest goddess and the muses of poetry and painting deliberating endlessly how to save the planet they governed and ultimately coming to the terrible conclusion that they had to kill the fifth child before her mismanaged powers ripped time itself irreparably. The fifth child herself her anxious tantrum multiplied by her own fitful timing wasn't even cognizant enough to realize what was happening but they were sure that she wouldn't want to live like this and equally certain that she wouldn't want to be the doom of the planet. From the far side of the world the eldest

sister drew back her bow and aimed a bolt at a distant point on the horizon. The bolt arced around the orb in seconds and missed every single one of the hundred thousand worshippers surrounding her sister and as the first atom of the razor sharp point of the arrow touched the fifth child's closed left eyelid -

Everything stopped. Unfortunately the fifth's lack of cognition did not override her instincts for self-preservation as she severed the planet's connection to time entirely. It was this timeless world frozen in place that was at the top and the bottom of the ladder the sixth child climbed.

The love the computer felt for the sisters was mutual. In space the sixth took the dust of the computer as her fourth suitor and delivered her fourth daughter, the computer goddess, as she climbed the ladder. As the girl came of age she aided her mother by calculating how she would carry time and causality with her and move on the time-stopped planet as well as the one location on the surface of the planet where time seemed to flow unchanged by the fifth's final tantrum.

In orbit around the planet she took leave of the computer and her daughter and climbed down to the frozen surface. She was far from her destination but there was no hurry she sadly walked through the stopped cities stopping sometimes to eat the scarce but unspoiled food or to scribble in her book now a composite of barkskin and glass and contemporary paper.

At last she reached the wall of thorns. With all the time in the world she picked her way through the thorns stopping mournfully at the nest of the stopped guardian bird. When she reached the wall of fire she was able to simply walk through it as the moment where she would be burned could not occur. Inside the fire territory she hugged the fire guardian sadly noting that this was the guardian's first contact with another being and her stopped mind could not experience it. When she reached the infinitely deep ravine she simply walked across it as gravity never took hold of her pedaling her feet in the air like the looney tunes coyote before he realizes he is no longer on the cliff. She gave the mole guardian an

affectionate pat and opened the door to the steel guardian's territory looking sadly at the frozen metal face of the loyal teacher. She passed through the water sphere as well just as slowly as she simply didn't drown. The whales not singing was especially tragic to her. Cracking the door to the citadel she stepped into her old room and felt the pressure adjust as she reentered normal time. She hadn't realized how noiseless the stopped world had been until she entered the silence of the citadel which was almost deafening in comparison. Her mother had designed the citadel so well it had resisted even the impossible attack of the fifth child.

The sixth walked through the still silence which was neither still nor silent in comparison to the territory she had been traveling through picking her way through the floor which she noted was clear of books and clothes. Marcie in her loneliness had finally won the battle against the girl's mess. At the far end of the room was a door a new door that hadn't been there when the girl had left a door which seemed locked by a mechanism

which culminated in a wildly unbalanced three-beam scale which she was unable to manipulate. At the other end of the room was the bed the sixth had slept in until she was sixteen years old the bed was made and there was a supine body on it, a body that looked like -

Yours said Marcie appearing behind the girl from the next room. The old computer and the rest of us couldn't stand the idea of it being ground up with the other six hundred and sixty six thousand six hundred and sixty five bodies. The fifth preserved it forever before she - you know.

Marcie made tea and they sat down Marcie explaining from her perspective what had been happening since the girl left on the golden bridge and the girl enumerating her various trials and tribulations enumerating her heartbreaks.

I met the most beautiful girl in the universe she started but then you killed her. Marcie grimaced. And then your sadness made that unhappen somehow and then she broke up with me. We really weren't compatible. It seems funny in the circumstances (gesturing to the stopped

world outside the citadel) but we were always moving different speeds. Then I threw myself into my poetry for a while and was a bitch to my sisters which you probably heard from them. When the new planet was discovered I went and then I missed mom and mom and my sisters so to try and communicate with them I designed an extremely elegant computer but it was too late. They were already stopped like the rest of the planet. Then I threw myself into operating my computer which caused a sort of feedback loop of beauty which distracted me so much I was unable to stop its destruction and all of my friends were killed. Then I took on four suitors and had four daughters. And now I'm here. She read Marcie a poem and they both went to sleep in the servant's quarters leaving the preserved corpse of the sixth's first body where it lay.

That night the sixth dreamed she took her own dead body as her fifth suitor. In the morning she knew she was pregnant again. She and Marcie kept each other quiet company for nine months.

When the Goddess of Death was born Marcie told the sixth that it had been six-hundred and fifty years since Marcie had been created at least by the internal clock she was equipped with and asked if she remembered her promise which the sixth of course did. And when the Goddess of Death turned sixteen and Marcie felt she was no longer needed she asked the sixth to reprogram her to remove the injunction against self-destruction. The sixth did so sadly and bid her goodbye locking herself into the servant's quarters to write.

Marcie left the citadel to suicide in peace and when the moment came the young goddess heard a small click in the room her mother's first body lay in. The three-beam scale had adjusted slightly and was infinitesimally more balanced. The scene triggered something latent in the young goddess and she realized why she had been born. She invited her mother to accompany her on her macabre journey and they set out walking into the noiseless stoppage. Once again the sixth wandered the surface of the frozen world this time accompanied by her daughter. When they found a

time-stopped person the goddess would quietly put them to rest.

As the stopped occupants dwindled the goddess knew the scale at home was moving more into balance. They returned to the glass ladder climbing into the stellar dust and had the goddess's half-sister the computer goddess calculate a list of the last six a list the sixth looked over sadly before telling the young goddess she was on her own and returning to the citadel.

The goddess of death laid the four elder sisters of the sixth to rest one by one and then both of the sixth's mothers. In the citadel the door locked by the beam scale slid open. The sixth entered and realized she was inside the seventh set of the citadel's walls which felt deeply wrong. In the center of the room was a pool that shimmered and reflected the room around the sixth but when she looked into it expecting to see her own face she saw nothing.

The sixth went and retrieved her book of poems and began to recite them to the pool. Line by line the sixth's reflection began to appear

gradually becoming clearer and clearer page by page. When she finished she sat quietly for a moment. Then looking down into the pool staring in her own eyes deeply the sixth bent to kiss herself. She took herself as her final suitor. Never and also instantly the goddess of permanent recursive change was born and the borders between everything eroded and everything glommed together in a kind of sludge. Or at least that's what the plants said.