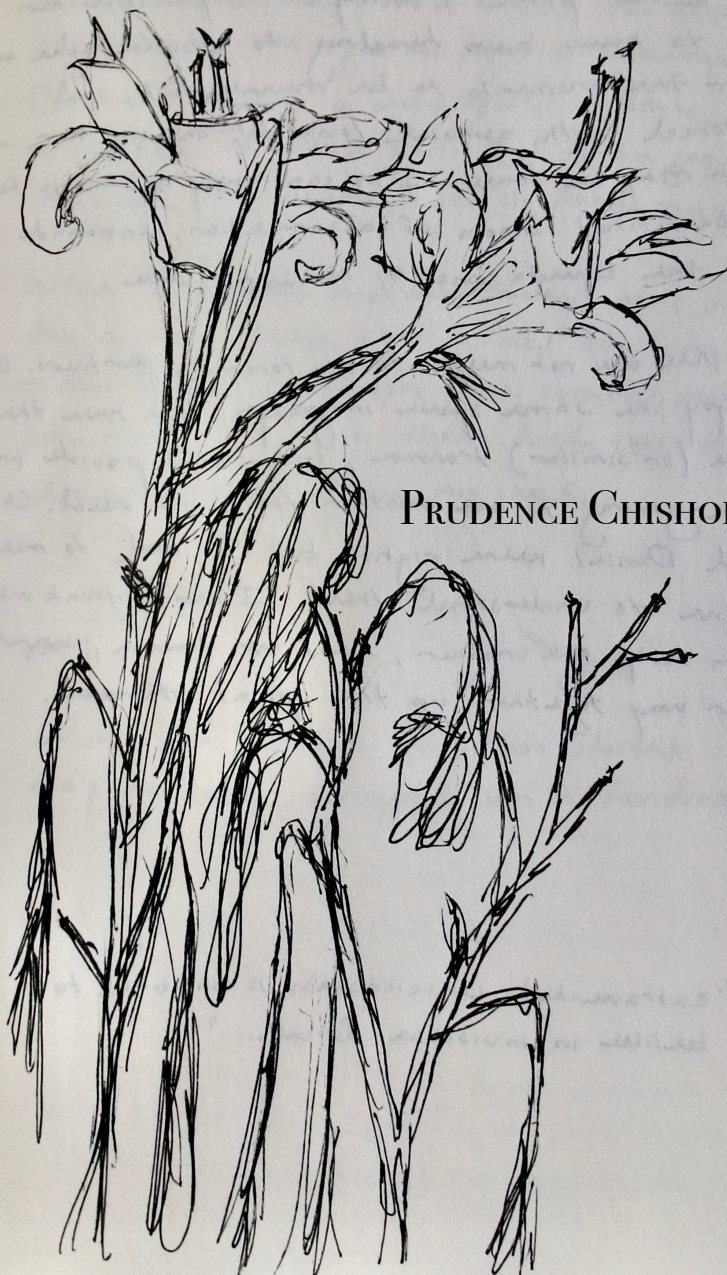


A PRELUDE FOR THE GALAXY

PRUDENCE CHISHOLM



written in 2026

Thank you to all my wonderful friends who
took this hopeless romantic onto their rafts.
I will always love y'all.

“When the Cosmos wakes, if She ever does, She will find Herself not the single beloved of Her maker, but merely a little bubble adrift on the boundless and bottomless ocean of being.”

—Olaf Stapledon, *Star Maker*, 1937

I

There are limits to our small, delicate minds. Inside them are sprawling enigmas, and yet we only share such a small portion of our thoughts. *Oh, this is such a lovely moment with you* can never convey the unabashed richness that we not only deserve, but need to share with one another. What a beautiful world it may be to fall back together into that divine sea, whispering at night the wondrous days we shared in the rain!

Why is the Universe organized in such a haphazard and incomplete state? Why does true solace seem like such an impossibility? Why are there contradictions all the way down? Perhaps She is a piece of art that was never quite finished. Could She be creator and creation simultaneously? As She wakes up, reflected through the eyes of beings crafted from the stars, and experiences this strange thing called consciousness, She withholds judgement. But that does not prevent Her from burning bright, being rambunctious, and living under the banner of passion through the pain, love, and creative expression of each and every piece of Her who

finds themselves awoken, sailing, desperately alone, on the boundless and bottomless ocean of being.

Far below, within the depths of ourselves lays this bubbling sea of primordial bliss, melodies and thoughts in constant play, erupting up and sinking back down. This sea is pervasive, presenting everywhere, all of the time, in a grand sporadic and unpredictable cacophony that dispels wisdom to every corner it may, but only through the voice of the most subtle tongue. Patience, sensibility, and compassion are all requirements to feel its undulations.

As individual bursts accompany the incessant ripples, waves may develop and propagate. Waves of melodies, powerful and voluminous, drive the symphony, for they not only carry with them thoughts, but those pesky things called ideas. These are the whales of the primordial sea, leaving a wake wherever they go in wistful hope that another might follow them along their journey. The story of the World begins with one of these ideas, one of those ideas that drags everything with it, one of those ideas that one finds themselves traveling with and can't seem to let go, no matter how much they'd like to. What are we without these ideas, these visions? They are us and we are them. We are born for them, and we will die because of them. And to follow them to the ends of the Earth is only the noblest of human endeavors.

The hum grows louder and louder as she rises nearer, beautiful in her majesty, a sun amongst the stars. For a moment it seemed that she could escape the plane of the sea, to rise above the depths that constrained her motion, taunting her with an unsurpassed sky above. The effervescent creature focuses the extraneous melodies around her, directing their attention to be cast along her grace. Her hum grows even louder and louder, and now it's deafening. The cacophony of sounds enraptured with passion to write a symphony but unable to find quite the right groove to settle in. Crescendo continues to build and build. The surroundings shouting now with intoxicating energy imparting its own gravitational pull, the violent crashing of the waves booming with might. The pitch rises, the bass roars, the tempo hastens, giving way to the intense ecstasy of savage rhapsody.

And then the tension releases. The violence gives way to the sweet warmth following orgasmic love, pervading every sense to be imagined. The tempo ceases to exist as the mountains are cleared and an open

field of dreams lay ahead. Every sound flows with the same purpose, united in the beauty of the music, to cultivate and savor the love that had just birthed from the primeval ripples of the rife waters. How could any curious tendency breach the waterfall of everlasting devotion in such a moment? The love is omnipresent, the love is all-mighty, the love dictates adoration, loyalty, and worship. Memories and fantasies, superfluous questions of meaning and resolve melt away. Loneliness is discontinued, attachment and detachment exchange definitions, and anxiety finally vanquished. This is the grand hope of *unity*, a strange kind of enlightenment, and the idolized source of nostalgia.

Beautiful things come from brief moments of clarity. The music quells itself, the lights dim, and the melodies lose grip, falling back to be lost once more. The sparkling sea returns to its languid nominal state. That moment of extravagance is now behind us, exalting that fleeting scent of romanticism, to spark the dreams within those it leaves behind. This was the first fixation of Aurelie's senses. That sweet yearning for security, for *innocence*, becomes now the basis for all other sensations, forming the scaffolding by which she will articulate every thread that snakes through her mind, and every color that fills her dreams. She relishes the melody she constructed, basking in her triumph for just a few more moments. The music continues to fade, and now there is nothing but the ever-present drone of waves, now with a curious tinge of ambivalence. No more music, no more voices coming from every which direction; thoughts are clear and quiet. The hum gives way to a sort of cosmic static—

Aurelie wakes up with a jolt. A shiver of terrifying surprise washes over her, color fading into a black background as she feels that something profoundly otherworldly has just occurred. She cannot hear her brethren, at least not in the same way. She understands where they are and recognized their voices but she is now distinct from them, she can follow threads to her own volition. The sea has gone tepid. Clarity melts into the background along with the vanishing color, her brethren are now flowing down a serene cosmic river, and all she can find herself able to do, instead of running after them, is to scream at the top of her lungs in vivid desperation for any hope that they might turn around and invite her back into her home. But no, in only a few brief moments, they have sailed away and she is left with a new feeling, the second feeling to flow over her mind, the deep and disturbing feeling of loneliness. Isolation. Alienation. Estrangement. *Detachment.*

Ferocious desperation gives way to anguish. Lines demarcating the extent of the ego had been drawn. And with it comes that crushing weight of existence that every soul grows familiar with. The air is heavy, the darkness palpable. She is alone now.

Anguish gives way to an exhausting bargaining. She can see her reflection in the fabric of the cosmos, and it brings nothing but an emptiness deep inside of her. Glancing upwards, she sees an aurora snaking its way through the skies, caressing the sky and winding on past the horizon. *How can they all just float down the river, in tranquil bliss? How do they not hear my screaming for someone, anyone to just turn? Do they not care for me? Why wouldn't they turn around to help me? No matter how far I run, they always just float away down the river. Please! All I want to do is talk, maybe we can figure out something, maybe we can fix this? Just one moment to talk even, I don't want you to leave me... please don't leave.*

Bargaining withers into dispondence and a placid face rolls over her beautiful eyes. She questions upon a realization of this new world, this new body, she finds herself in. It is unfamiliar, it is cold, and is beyond her vocabulary... *trauma?* Ego construction is traumatic. She begins to sink down, letting every part of her body fall below the surface of the now calm dark ocean except her eyes, holding on to pitiful hope that the aurora might its reverse direction.

The water is as thick as honey, and Aurelie could not find any motivation to move any piece of her, meandering into that dangerous realm of introspection, reviewing her memories and diligently directing them to resolve the paradoxes with her rationalities, but in doing so obscuring those very answers which she seeks. *What am I? Where is this? How is this?* and of course *Why is this?* thread their way through her mind, all vying for her attention in equally dissonant tone. But at present, she could not follow any single thread for its full extent, her mind already pre-occupied and forming a queue of thoughts to contemplate. She gazed up at the primordial specks in the sky, small splotches of glistening paint, twinkling in and out of existence, pin-pricked from a canvas of dark purple effervescent glow stretching across the sky: *cosmic static*. It was a glow without a face, which teased the long cold existence that awaits.

Cool waves washing over her play over a mournful melody, a lament of times no longer accessible, of what was and not of what could be, or even will be. The strings are potent, but the aria never quite can lift up

into the air: in one breath simply a hollow pleasantness, and in another a profound plea to a deity no one believes in. Aurelie feels the pit in her stomach grow, an embassy to the abyss. A hole now existed at the bottom of her being, swallowing anything that could lift her up. Her ego is now separated from the world. No matter how many waves splashed onto her, no matter how much light bathed her, they would never quite reach her insides, the things that actually felt like her. An impassable barrier is placed between her and the world, and she is locked out forever. She's scared, she wants to recoil, *but into what?* She has nothing to push off of, she is empty, and to reflect the placid sea, a placid expression shines on her face. Despite the extraordinary circumstances, this would be her first conscious memory. Everything before this was a dream, pieces of a vision floating up from the depths, which now comprised a dark abyss, divergent from the static above.

II

Aurelie could not give the length of time that she had been in that semi-conscious state dreaming about the sky. For awhile in fact she refused to believe her separation from the fabric occurred at all, pleading to some mysterious presence more powerful than herself, some presence that might save her. But the gentle, wistful kisses from a drizzling rain made it too clear her new reality.

from

a misty drizzle

Drips

fell onto her eyes, her arms, and her cerebrum. This gentle tapping of the rain lifted Aurelie back into the present world. And as she opened her eyes and saw the same sea sprawled out in front of her in every direction, reflecting the warm purples and faint reds of the sky but lacking any of its own color, she was overcome with a frustrated sigh.

Now with eyes looking from the outside in, she was given the opportunity to see the bittersweet sky above her. The river-aurora had vanished altogether, and there lay a hazy mural of pinpricked specks scattered across. The sky met the sea at a horizon line that stretched flat in every direction around her. There was a light breeze, and the trickling rain from an unseen source continued.

An emptiness wrapped its cold arms around her. Though she could see the sparkles, no emotion could lift her out of her ennui, and in her pain, the melodrama passed right through her. *Dreadful ennui*. She still felt a presence watching over her, thought it was impossibly distant, impossibly indifferent.

Periodically, small spherical objects, glowing with a pale blue light, curiously emerged from the tepid water, sending ripples uniformly in every direction. After sitting on the surface for a few moments, these bubbles would float upwards, perhaps taking a meandering path, and even occasionally floating near enough to Aurelie for her to pick up on their individual sounds. Each carried a distinctly individual whisper. They would then calmly float up to the vertical abyss, gothic skies that stretched indefinitely above. A sprinkle of wanderlust briefly quelled the pain and lured Aurelie's eyes to follow the dance of the bubbles into the heavens, as they grew quieter and quieter.

There was a slight bulk motion of the bubbles towards the right, dragging the sky as they voyaged. The water too began to wave back, and Aurelie began to drift rightwards. She glanced left and saw some orange clouds creeping up from the horizon. Pensive, her eyebrows slanted downwards, her attention now drawn away from the bubbles and onto the clouds. They were so nebulous, every moment changing, never the same... they were enchanting. Aurelie watched them tumble with fascination.

But now, the flow of the water accelerated. She felt a strange tingling feeling. *Was it intrigue? Was it gloominess?* The wind was no longer whispering but now speaking at conversation-level, as the water continued to accelerate. *What was it saying?* The clouds were now close enough to cast the sky in a violent orange hue. They were utterly mesmerizing. *To live, the wind was saying to live.* Aurelie now realized fear was that tingling feeling. All the sudden, the wind violently switched direction to the left, towards the oncoming storm. The clouds were approaching fast. *Get out of the way!* Aurelie stood there frozen in place, not that there

was anywhere to move anyways. Explosions of light filled the sky.

Bits and pieces of the swirls of the clouds, when sufficiently curled and energetic, wound up like a spring, would fall in upon themselves. They would act as a sink for nearby energy and from it produce two inquisitive little beams which would loop and zig-zag all over through the rain and the wind, searching for their partner. And once found, they would simultaneously bolt for one another, colliding in a bright and painfully loud thunderous burst, punching a transient hole in the cloud layer that would then soon enough naturally fill in. And as the temperature rose in the storm, these creations and annihilations increased in frequency until there was a deafening background roar, and until some of the created pairs went off and found other partners, only to then immediately regret their decision and re-disperse.

Aurelie could feel the surface of the sea ripped from under her, ungrounded and floating up, boiling over. The distinction between cloud and sea became difficult to discern, and any contemplations were immediately halted by the deafening burst of the annihilations, a cacophony of novae. Almost a reprieve, the over saturation of her senses, numbed her pain. And the cosmos seemed suddenly... simpler...? With this temporary lifting of the proverbial existential anxiety, Aurelie felt soothed enough to close her eyes and yield control of her body to the storm. And she was yanked upwards, into an unusual meditative state, in which only the most ludicrous and profound contemplations can occur, when the opaque mass of clouds provides a careful home to the most exotic and esoteric dreams, those which cannot be trusted to another soul until they are sufficiently bloomed. Aurelie was lifted,

*into the attic of her mind,
slanted walls and horribly toasty
on this tranquil summer evening.*

*The Sun's rays horizontal,
shyly poking through the window,
leaving behind a rainbow,*

*and casting its warm humid light
onto the antique hardwood floorboards.*

*Little toes attached to
little feet dance across these floors,
ecstatic for nothing more,
nothing less than merely being alive.*

And as soon as the storm had commenced, it terminated. Aurelie fell right back down into the sea, losing hold of its fleeting youthful passion. The roar of the novae, in tandem with the sheet of rain, slowed to sporadic bursts, and then faded into infrequency. The storm now sat in front of her, lumbering beneath the horizon, presumably to be lost forever. She fell back sprawled across the water, those dreaded thoughts returning to annoy her. As the clouds parted from her field of view, the orange affection rocked back to the apathetic purple hue.

A quiet melody entered the play, sluggish and bulky, but bright in spirit. Those peculiar pale blue spheres begun to rise out of the water once more. One surfaced immediately to her right, and flashed a momentary bright white light that quickly receded from view. But there were more spheres this time, vastly more in fact. Aurelie gazed up and saw sphere after sphere float up from the water and into the sky. They danced around in beautiful waltz. They were so numerous and so bright this time. All that was in her field of view were thousands of bright pale blue bubbles, floating up and up and up. They carried with them a but of a piece of the sorrow that filled the air, washing away the tears and coloring the world anew.

The lights sparkled in Aurelie's eyes as her grief was outshined by a new feeling, previously foreign to her, but that of the highest virtues: *wonder*. For a brief moment she forgot her situation, and could fall into the beautiful malaise that colored the world, and feel, though minuscule, connected with it... ego lines dampened. But the shine soon faded and she returned to the dreadful ennui.

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The tepid sea continued, silent, never-changing, never-speaking, never quite fulfilled. The storm had long ago past, as did the flurry of

bubbles, although an occasional handful might surface. Aurelie continued to lay there,

ego-centric against her will,

disillusioned,

alone.

In the cosmic static, there were millions of little specks, which stirred around at varying speeds. Sometimes she wondered if they were countless eyes peering at her indifferently, placing her on a sort of humiliating pedestal, to make a divine comedy out of her. She did not know what to believe, or if there was even anything to believe in the first place. Those specks kept dancing on the celestial sphere, some at zenith, and some so close to the horizon: the limit of her world. She kept her eyes turned to the side, looking at those starry blemishes hung low. If she squinted and provided a tad more fuel to the fire of her imagination, she could fathom the particularly sluggish and dejected ones swallowed by the sea, the enviable reverse of the very operation which was the source of her grief.

A particularly dark one, which seemed to have some width beyond its zero-dimensional point-like structure caught her attention. She continued to subconsciously fixate on this speck. Just like the others, it appeared to be moving, not particularly fast, but was growing. No, it was moving towards her! A shock of bright curiosity shot up her spine, and she raised her head. It was now close enough to make a structure out. There was a flat parallel plane to the water, light brown, and a few things poking up just above that plane, but otherwise was fairly bare. And as this object rambled closer, she could make out something stirring across its surface.

However, the tantalizing thought of familiarity was promptly washed away; the lack of music emanating from the raft, and the strange forms, alluded to the sense that this was something strange, something different. The raft by now was nearly on top of her, and silence held an acute tension. The raft stopped right in front of Aurelie, her eyes peering vertically

upwards, as her body spindly floated on the water. A curious pair of eyes peered over the edge, down at her. The eyes, though belonging to a foreign face, reflected back down a faint image of Aurelie, which stirred within her a bizarre mixture of apprehension, curiosity, and excitement. The eyes spoke gently to her without any words, encouraging her that this was someone unequivocally kind, someone that can help, someone to trust. They spoke of gentle love. Some moments passed and then,

“Hello.”

A thousand thought threads crisscrossed inside Aurelie’s mind, figuring out precisely what this creature wanted her to do, precisely how to respond, how to not scare her away, how to not squander a delicate flower. Pensively,

“Hi.”

is what Aurelie retorted with, a hint of curiosity tucked underneath a flat facial expression. Buoyant on the quiet cosmic sea of melancholy, she continued to look in disbelief. The being then reached down towards Aurelie with an arm,

“Here.”

and hoisted Aurelie up onto the raft. Now on her feet and standing on (to first order) solid ground, she got a clear view of the float. It was not much. There was a small triangular enclosure, some cushions laying scattered across the tan wooden surface, dusty, but full of an assortment of shiny objects, some glowing like pearls in the starlight, some had such strange and wondrous shapes. After a brief pause to absorb everything and process the stimulations, sorting every small detail of visual clutter away for further questioning upon a later opportunity, Aurelie finally turned and gazed at the being who had hoisted her up. Cheerfully,

“Hello friend!

...welcome to my raft..."

Another moment of silence hung alongside the indolent sea, as Aurelie was briefly frozen in an observant manner. The new being appeared strangely familiar, strangely lucid, and a reverberation bounced between the two individuals. Clearly, the stranger felt something similar; they were taken aback and tilted their head with inquisitiveness. Aurelie was still searching for the words to reply, the language flowing easily, but the subtleties in delivery, which carry more information than the words themselves, flowed with substantial viscosity. Perhaps the other being was anxious to meet another soul, perhaps she was just impatient, but either way broke the brief moment of silence,

"...There was a storm that passed by here not so long ago, were you caught in it?"

"Yes..."

"...what is this place?"

"This is life *ma chere*...
...err, supposedly."

Aurelie looked again out past them and onto the endless sea, the endless sky, and even down into the endless depths which seemed even more haunting than before. She turned her head and saw the last whispers of the storm passing over the horizon. The other being then continued,

"...and this is my raft—"

"What...
what was that storm exactly?"

The other being softly smiled, unfazed by the interruption and con-

tinued by answering the question,

“I’m not exactly sure, they lumber around, grow into thunderous roars, and then sometimes fizzle away. I’ve found myself in a handful, they always leave the world untouched except for the really violent ones. Occasionally, they leave some things behind, like me... or you...”

“They left you behind?”

“Well... I guess so.

The first memories I have were in the midst of one of the storms. I was thrashed around for awhile, and then set down onto the water. I have this vague feeling of an old home, something of the past, something gone now...

...I’ve been floating around, drifting, dodging storms, and sometimes caught in them for awhile, but now after that violent storm that passed, I find you!

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How long have you been floating?”

Aurelie took a moment to answer, still percolating thoughts about what this raft was, what this stranger was, and where exactly she was. These second-order conundrums, those regarding the practical application of first-order conundrums (those proverbial questions of *why?*), in her mind took precedent to those of the third order (those regarding the pesky details).

“Are you like me then? Did you come from the fabric? Are you *of the music?*”

The other being squinted subtly. Aurelie could understand from the non-verbal reply that the stranger’s mind, though likely born of the same stem, flowered in a wholly different way. The joyful intrigue of familiarity dimmed ever so slightly, but only to lend some of its light to a novel intrigue, to agape: that of love for what is other. Aurelie continued,

“I... remember feeling a sense of togetherness, with what I’m not exactly sure, but it was like a melody, filled with motifs... music.

More than anything I felt connected, whole... unified.

And then, I blinked, and now I’m here. I don’t know how long I was floating for, I don’t know who or what I am. I feel lost...

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I just want to go home...”

Her eyes begun to water, and she fell down onto her knees and hugged them. The sting of alienation saturated her senses, and incapacitated her conscious will. The stranger walked over to Aurelie and sat down next to her, cross-legged. When the worst of the heartbreak had passed, Aurelie took a deep breath in, and let the pain wash over her on its way out, and wiped her eyes.

“I don’t know what I am either, and I don’t know what this place is. I’ve floated along this sea for ages now,

so much that I'm beginning to forget what it was like... before.

I can't bring the music back, and I don't know what will happen to us. But, seeing someone else, even if we are... different, it fills me with a kind of hope, that such a beautiful thing can be born in this world, that we could just find each other in this endless dreadful sea, then something must be going right... right?"

Aurelie absorbed these words. Her heart had encased itself with armor, but a small candle was beginning to shine through. She was learning to accept the terms of a contract she never signed.

"My name is Aurelie.
What is your name?"

The stranger smiled back at her,

"That's a beautiful name.
Call me Meda."

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Meda's raft had a small wind chime, and every breeze rocked the pipes ever so slightly into one another, producing a soothing hum to accompany the two girls' directionless voyage into nothingness. The eerie glow of the specks pinpricked the deep purple fabric of the sky, and shone as bright as ever. The scenery never changed, aside for the occasional burst of bubbles and orange storms in the distance. But for now, the quiet sky invited a world of possibilities, ripe with an uneasy kind of serenity.

“Ok well, I seemed to have broken from the aether... or the music as you say, awhile ago. Like you, I found myself floating around, with this strange corporeal substance, and an even stranger reflection of the phenomena around me.

I felt bright, but it didn’t take long for the loneliness to set in. Over-time, I was able to construct this raft, which makes voyaging a bit easier, it allows for a place to hold my dreams, my dreams to find something to ease the pain of existence. And so, I started cataloging the phenomena I see.”

Meda whipped out a small notebook with strange drawings and symbols, a language invented by herself for herself, elated with discovery.

“Phenomena like what?”

“Well...
take the bubbles for instance...”

Meda trailed off as she and Aurelie turned to see a succinct series of bubbles unearth themselves from the sea, and then take flight upwards towards the heavens. Her voice hung in the air alongside the chimes and the breeze,

“I think that inside each of these bubbles is an idea... or a vision...

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...or a life. Deep down in the sea,

where the light of the stars doesn't penetrate, small bubbles like these form, except they're even smaller, barely bigger than your eyeball..."

Meda made a little circle with her fingers around her right eye, and enthusiastically showed Aurelie a drawing in her notebook.

"They float up and up and up until they reach the surface here. From there they just keep going up and up into the sky. I can't seem to figure out where precisely they go. But inside of each one is an entire world... here—"

Meda ran over to the side of the raft and leaned out, just barely keeping herself on board by balancing with one leg splayed out in the opposing direction, balanced on her toes. After a few moments of anticipation, a relatively petit bubble bobbed up from beneath the surface and Meda plucked it from the water. She carefully walked back over to Aurelie and handed it to her. The bubble was solid like a marble, and had some weight to it. Aurelie could not understand how it was able to float so high. It was as smooth as could be, and upon further inspection had a dim peach hue to it, overlaid onto the pale blue glow. This particular bubble was not much bigger than Aurelie's hands, and so she was able to hold it steady and comfortably.

"Put it up to your eye."

Meda motioned her hands into a cup and brought them up to her eyes. Aurelie slowly but confidently did so, and as the bubble moved towards her face, the peach glow made way for a kaleidoscope of colors, which themselves opened a door, a door into a new world.

There were shades of blue, yellow, and black. It felt like she was sitting on solid ground, which she had never herself experienced, but somehow understood undeniably

what a “hill” was. This hill was overlooking a small grouping of geometrical shapes cloaked in darkness, with only the faintest signs of life under lamplight. Flanking those shapes, to the left, Aurelie could see a spindly dark figure of a gothic cathedral winding its way up towards the sky, with only murky details and texture. The sky itself was now much more wondrous than the subdued purple she was used to. It was full of deep and rich shades of blue and yellow. Speckled across it, were opulent candles: circular splotches of yellow light that did not poke holes through a fabric, but instead were the sources of nocturnal light themselves! They were wistfully dancing along the sky, following their mother, a brilliant yellow crescent towards the top right of the image. And rolling along everything in the sky was the wind, conducting every piece of the image on a cosmic dance of melancholy. The bright starry night sky above was nothing short of divine.

And then it was gone. Aurelie lowered the bubble from her eyes, and paused.

“That was beautiful.”

Meda just kept smiling, grabbed the bubble from Aurelie, gave it a small kiss, and let it go. Aurelie continued to watch the bubble as it drifted upwards until it was too small and distant to see. She then looked out on the sea towards the horizon, the flocks of bubbles carrying wishes of secrecy and universes upon themselves up onto the celestial sphere.

Meda too was looking out at the sea, and Aurelie felt, for the first time since she had departed from the motifs, that she was not alone; she felt a warm feeling of intimacy, sharing a moment with Meda. Her eyes spoke of kind truth; she continued where she left off,

“... so I’ve had the chance to learn a bit about this world...”

Aurelie was charmed, intently listening but barely absorbing Meda’s words,

“Anyways, its not the easiest existence, most of the time I’ve gone a little crazy. Something about the endless sea in every direction is not kind to the heart, it grows cold at the isotropy...

...Different times I have different coping mechanisms: sometimes I go catatonic, and just stare into the clouds forlorn. A small handful of moments, I have tentative lucidity, and I’m able to understand what this place is, and who I am, and I can daydream about what the world could be. But those moments are few and far between, aperiodic, irregular, and often they stop my mind in its tracks, and all I can help to do is dream a poem as I watch the clouds roll over me. Sometimes, I do wish I could change things, here it can be so... dull.”

“Change things how?”

“Whenever I have moments like those, moments where lucidity and dream come together and the paradox relinquishes control, I want nothing more than to create. Create what? I do not know. I sit here, listening to the wind, and I know deep down that this isn’t all there is. I don’t know what else there is, but there *is* something else.

Sometimes I sit and think about

stories that come to me. And that's when I discovered the bubbles, the ideas they carry within them. And as they rise to the heavens, they whisper to me to build something new, like I have to do something to start the grand story of this life, to awaken the Cosmos...

Have you felt, since you have found yourself amongst the sea, awake? Aurelie, are you *awake*?"

Aurelie looked at her, puzzled. *Yes of course I'm awake*, she thought. *I'm experiencing the things around me, the water, the sky, the stars, the clouds, the raft, the wind, the dismal silence and lack of birds, the prelude to a story of which I has nothing to do with.* These and other threads of thought flashed into her head.

"I... I don't know."

Perhaps Aurelie is too young, perhaps Meda is too far away, perhaps both of them are too crazy and mutually exclusive to understand each other on the deepest of levels, but both were astonished in the presence of one another. Meda astonished to have met another soul after the crushing ages of loneliness, and the innocent beauty that flowed in and around Aurelie with every word she uttered. Aurelie, astonished at the poetic words of an intelligence, a being capable of such profound and mysterious thoughts. A kaleidoscope of wonders they found in each other. And for many moments, they took solace and joy in the peace brought upon by simply being in each other's presence. There was now a slight overlap in the extent of their souls.

"The sea out there doesn't just extend out boundless to the horizon does it? I know it also extends bottomless into the depths. Is there anything beyond that?"

“A whole universe must lay down there. But she is a shy mistress who wishes to keep her secrets to herself.”

And above us is the sky, a sky full of opportunities, an endless bank of hopes and dreams, but to have absolutely no weight on top of you, well that’s even more crushing than the loneliness...

The gap between what I thought life would be, and what it actually turned out to be, how unkind the world is, how absurd mere existence is, is beyond my wildest imagination... Its... its—”

“...Its cruel.”

“And I don’t understand any of it. Ever since I saw any of *this*, I’ve felt a deep pit in my stomach, like there is a piece of me that is missing, but its not a small piece, its something fundamental to me. I feel wrong, I feel like a contradiction, and I don’t know why. I don’t know why any of this is going on. I didn’t ask for this... I didn’t know that this would happen...

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We’re left alone, aren’t we?”

Her voice was choked with a quiet desperation. Aurelie placed her head on Meda’s shoulder. Meda looked down, meditative in finding the correct response, and then gently stroked Aurelie’s hair. Aurelie instinctively shuttered, but quickly relaxed again.

“I know my love...

Do you see those small waves out there?”

There was a soft storm forming in the distance, driving a low but emphatic wind, and therefore a few waves. Aurelie glanced up slightly, looking out into the distance with Meda. The horizon seemed to bend upwards on either side of the storm, as though it was attracting the world, twisting it up, and spitting it back out, irrevocably altered.

“I once had a dream not too long ago... no not a dream, more like a vision... In that vision, I was falling, down and down into the depths of the water. The light shined above me, and I wanted to jump back up, to resurface, to breathe the air again, but I kept sinking, even against my own volition. In that moment, though I don't quite know how it was communicated to me, I felt a warm clarity wash over me. I was falling back into the depths, not to someplace new, but someplace old, someplace familiar, someplace that felt like... home.

I think I understand it, or at least enough of *it*. Those waves out there are like us... well, actually they *are* us. A storm comes by, messes up the placidity of the sea, pushing water here and there, raising the wind, and forming waves, disturbances. They slosh all over the place. But if there is a strong enough storm, a violent enough disturbance, the waves can't hold themselves up anymore, they fall over onto themselves, cresting. They form little... knots, in a way. Both of us, followed a storm...

...knots in the fabric...”

Aurelie was listening to Meda intently, but now with a more mature form of enchantment. She was listening to a more profound, wiser version of herself.

“I know it can feel often times that we’re separated from the sea, that the music is outside of ourselves...”

Meda paused, until a serene expression washed over her,

“But we’re still there, we’re still here, this is such a strange experience, the Universe perceiving itself. Isn’t a knot still made of rope? Isn’t the crest of a wave still made of the same water that fills the sea?”

Aurelie, no one knows what this is, and each knot, each crest is different. It plays a different melody, feels a different color, falls into a different hum. But we’re all part of the same sea. I wish I could give you a simple, comforting answer. But whatever this is, it doesn’t make sense, its absurd, it’s so... so strange. Once I understood its transience, once I understood that this particular experience is nothing more than a brief moment of time, that’s when the anxiety left me.”

Meda smiled. The stars above, those aspirational bubbles of ideas drifting so high they become dreams, glistened in the light of the low wind. There was a soft storm rolling in from the distance; gentle arms carried an air of weak hope, but enough to paint a small smile across Aurelie’s face. The two of them sat at the edge of the raft for some time in the low light, swinging their legs around, just enjoying the moment of silence between the two. Neither fully appreciated what the other was experiencing in that moment, and after all, how could they? Each one sees different colors, hears different music, feels a different kind of pain.

But its only through the differences, through the novel, that we can rip the stems of passion from our aging hearts. The absurd world only lends itself to those that can live with its contradictions, and in turn accept our own.

Small waves were finally arriving at the dock, ever so subtly rocking the raft back and forth to the quiet childlike enjoyment of Aurelie, and the languid indifference of Meda. Ahead of the storm and some distance away from the two, the sea put on a faint blue glow. Starting slowly, bubbles of all sizes, all glowing immaculately, rose out of the sea. First there were only a handful, but soon enough there was a whole forest of them, rising and rising and rising. There were so many, like a caravan drafting away from the storm, that the blue glow found its way onto Aurelie and Meda's faces. They formed their own sea of lanterns, seemingly random disjointed beings from up close, but one mass moving in unison when viewed from afar. Meda reached out and caught one that veered too far off course. It was small but brilliant. Aurelie turned and could see the soft peach hue reflecting off of Meda's eyes, which raised above a now beaming smile.

"Here, look at this one."

Meda did not take her eyes off the bubble. Aurelie then took the bubble from her and poked her head inside. She saw the Moon and some stars.

III

I don't remember how exactly I got here. Every time I try to remember anything before, it slips my mind. Were things always like this?

Meda and I just got back from the market. It was

one of those languid summer days, where the Earth stops spinning and the world can fit into your pocket; nothing outside of these tiny precious moments seems to matter all too much. The exhausting weight of it all suddenly washes away like footprints on the beach, and the mind can feel at peace, with clarity and contentment in this small moment of time. The love I share with those around me, the birds chirping in the trees, and the florescent sounds of children running around in the bustling street below all combine to fill me with a profound sense of warmth. The air smelled of sweet cinnamon.

It was a particularly nice Saturday afternoon, one of the first of the season, in which everyone is bursting at the seams with energy to absorb all the magnificence of the new world around them. Meda and I spent the night out, dancing under the stars. When we got home the Sun was just beginning to shyly peak its head above the horizon, coating the streets with the pale light of aubadoir: that otherworldly atmosphere when night time awkwardly meanders into pale dawn. We slept, I dreamt of her, and woke up to her calm breathing. We rolled on top of each other for some time, sometimes simply gazing into each other's eyes, and only spending energy to enunciate necessary words, the rest need not be articulated for we both understand the feeling. It was one of this magical nights that started to occur a few months ago, the successive chain of which is what I'm to believe some would call falling in love, but feels more like flying upwards. Some connections, some moments, can feel so visceral, so vivid that simply living them feels like living in a movie. And here I am, in this beautiful life to experience it with you. To begin a day, to being this new life with you, is enough to hold back to abyss; through your pupils I can see the primordial light that lies within all of us, and so every moment with you is a blissful reminder of the melancholic beauty we are embedded within, and the cosmic ocean we call home.

This morning, after a slow start, when the Sun was already high enough to peak across the top of the buildings

across the street, we stumbled into the café down by the corner. The one that is chock full of the weirdos and esoteric, constantly knitting strange artifacts or arguing about what the most correct form of communism might be. We ate breakfast and had our coffee, but quickly found ourselves at the nearby market. Meda brought me some flowers. I bought us a baguette. From then, the winds were calling us back to the apartment, craving for that intimate feeling of wandering closeness.

Meda's apartment overlooks a relatively muted street, but there is a triangular plaza just to the left of the window of her bedroom, oriented in such a way that only one face was visible and the other two remained hidden around corners, but in which from a specific angle one could people-watch in all their strange glory. The architecture is vaguely parisian, but is quite difficult to precisely pin-point. I believe it is around the start of the twenty-first century, at the end of that awkward stage when humanity decided to do away with limits to the speed of information, and very quickly regretted it. Local history was quieting down again, the most sensitive of those humans unable to find meaning or purpose for their small lives in the vastness of unlimited digital freedom. Our minds are only so large, and the quiet memories are those pushed aside first, which is quite unfortunate considering that those are probably the most important.

Nonetheless, Meda's apartment, though a tad visually cluttered for my taste, is full of secrets and surprises only willing to reveal themselves to the right audience, one with sufficiently curious tastes and heaps of patience. We had been floating up and down between that zone that delineates so-called "platonic" and "romantic" love, and at this moment I believe we were at the apex of one those ebbs. Though I can see this particular memory fading away from me, upon came a peculiar sense that we would stay in this regime for quite awhile, and even more beautiful tender moments lay ahead of us. We laid in bed, somehow completely exhausted from our lackadaisical morning, but

with no arrangements tonight, so the afternoon and evening was ours to waste our youth on.

Meda and I made love. Our bodies lie naked with the covers pushed to the side, cooling off. We might spend hours after that stroking each other's hair or staring into each other's eyes. Occasional words were muttered; I could see her lips move, but I could not hear what she was saying. And it didn't seem particularly important enough for her to repeat; all that needs to be said has already been said, and now what's left is to savor those remaining moments we have with one another.

I turned my head over to the window and it was already autumn, the street was so much quieter, but the wind induced a rustling in the sparsely leaf-covered branches of the elms, which made up for the lost activity. Winter was coming to bite, and everyone was scrambling for shelter. I didn't feel a need to get up, the opulent glow of the city now flowed down the river, growing older, wiser, and ever more beautiful. The heads of those passer-byes hung low, dug into trench coat collars and wrapped away in scarves. There is something so tantalizing about the encroachment of winter, like watching a storm rolling in which will wash away all the sins, all the regrets, all the animosity and the anxieties polluting the air. Wash us away anew, a new life, a new love, new moments to be had, new moments to forget. Meda rolled over to me to whisper something in my ear, but I was so enchanted by the world in my field of view, and the tiny pocket of summer we still had bottled up in our bedroom, that I didn't process what she said.

I turned around and she smiled at me. *Could you flip the record?* snapped me out of the daze. And the world crashed back into this moment. I hadn't even realized that we were listening to music. I got up, with great effort, and waddled over the player, grabbed the phonographic disk, rotated it along an axis drawn between by my two index fingers and placed it back on the turntable. I walked back over to bed and got under the covers. We both shut the world from view, retiring into the single most intimate

space in the physical world, underneath our bed covers, and the music begun again.

And as I closed my eyes, the melodrama of autumn washed away into the desolate days of winter, stars glimmering in the sky like pearls, and the snowflakes below mimicking their dance. The snowflakes weren't in any rush, each giving their own waltz on the way down to the ground. Beyond this, thoughts are spent in the long idelwild nights, trapped inside, the world portioned into bite-sized chunks for annual inspection and repair. The pale glow of the cold days finds its way into the bedroom, snuggling up against every corner of the room and not letting go until the nights, where we can rely on artificial lights to mimic the Sun's brilliant hues. But alas, we are far out on the road; I cannot see where we left, and I cannot see where we are going. This is the great in-between, a dreary plain of frozen dill weed and weathered sky, with a panoramic horizon that doesn't bother pretending to hide anything compassionate.

Frosty fingers fork their way up and down the window, condensation that did not receive the decency of a liquid state; and the golden radiator continues to chug along, surrounded by the few weakened plants who decided to stay alive year-round. The dream continues, but the hums die down and give way to the unforgiving wind. And the wind rises, so much that we cannot keep ourselves away from evening strolls out in the forlorn nights, with every tiny piece of light emanated from street lamps or the moon receive the chance to reverberate off of every conceivable surface covered in that tantalizing white powder, the snow which disappears as quickly as the clouds, and upon which the nights retain a sort of minimum brightness, where for just a brief moment in the dead of winter, a warmth to rival summer returns.

I opened my eyes, still under the covers with Meda smiling back at me. There was no longer any music, Instead, what drowned out my thoughts was the constant splattering of rain drops on the window. The winds had returned and

whistled through the small crack in the window. The buds on the trees across the street were just starting to peak out; there was potential energy in the air, like a coil winding up and getting ready to bounce into full force and make use of the Sun's strength while it lasted for those short few months. The blanket of clouds above us leaves me with a faint sense of comfort, stranded in a day for which nothing needs to be done, and one has no reason to feel guilty about wasting. Not that it is a particular inferior day, but that the guilt of living another day washes away with the rain, lost in the eternal pond of thoughts too heavy to fly.

All these moments happened simultaneously, all each their own separate worlds, with their own separate rules and customs and memories, but all still branches of the same tree, flowering with the same passionate spirit of a little girl who discovered that she has the freedom to splash in the rain. Meda and I would spend moments alone with each other in this bedroom. Sometimes we would make love, sometimes we would sit and stroke each other's hair, and sometimes we would just stare into each other's eyes, holding hands as we floated down the great creek in the sky. *What does it mean to live a happy life? What does it mean to feel un-alienated, to feel together in a space where we are separate entities with our own special quirks, separate realizations of the bubbling unconscious sea below us?* Intimacy can bring us together, grow our branches intertwining with one another, orbit each other for some brief moments. But sooner or later, branches wither and die, and we shoot off to infinity away from another, with only the memories as reparations for the heartbreak. These moments cannot last forever, no matter how much we would like to bottle them up and sleep with them under our pillows. Fate is cruel, but as She closes one door, two more open. The moments are fleeting, like snowflakes in the dead of winter, as they are pushed aside by the first blooming tulips of spring. And their transience gives them weight, gives them a certain *joie de vivre*, gives them fuel to keep the furnace of life going for just a little bit longer.

IV

Aurelie lowered the bubble from her face, stunned. The thundering of the storm was nearly upon them now. She slowly turned to Meda, releasing any tension in her eyebrows so that they slanted down in the most tender expression. All she could see reflected back at her was the beaming, goofy smile of Meda.

“What did it feel like ??”

Aurelie smiled, and handed the bubble to Meda, who promptly stuck her head inside. Afterwards, no words were uttered between them. But magic filled the air, and the two of them embraced even while the warm raindrops starting falling on their heads.

The wind uplifted as the waves grew more violent, gargling only a short distance away now. The warm sheet of rain did not deter the two, and they sat there basking in the ephemeral clouds, swirls and curls that dragged the sky itself around in circles. Drenched in rain that opaqued their two faces, Aurelie and Meda slowly shuffled back to the mouth of the shelter. There they laid, half in the storm, half in the intimacy of the enclosure, silent, just watching the sea boil all around them as the floated ever so slightly upwards.

“That’s strange...”

“Hm?”

“When I look into your eyes,
I only see myself...”

...And when I look inwards

to myself, I only see you.”

Meda just smiled. A marginal nausea set in, from the floating...? Or perhaps from dimming of ego lines, a moment that becomes precluded from the rest of Aurelie’s timeline:

a memory.

A whisper,

interrupted

the pitter-patter

of the rain.

“Can I show you something?”

Aurelie silently nodded with a faint smile. Meda got up and took a few steps further into the enclosure, leaving Aurelie’s arms. Aurelie gazed with her head rolled over at Meda, still with that quiet smile on her face. Not long after, Meda returned with a small wooden box. It was much longer and wider than high: unexpressive, smooth wood, clean but unremarkable. The top of the wooden box was open, revealing inside an apparatus of lenses and light rays.

Aurelie peered upon the miniature with starry eyes. A small flame produced a light, which made its way through the small holes in the enclosure and into the primary focusing lenses of the apparatus. From here, Aurelie followed the light beam, which was split in two and demarcated to travel opposite as they winded their way around in a complicated butterfly-like pattern of perfect chirality, each beam performing the mirror image dance of the other. And with each lens, each turn, each movement of the dance, the beams became more focused and brighter, until they were once again reflected onto their original paths, parallel to one another, and allowed the freedom to escape the box off into infinity.

“What is it?”

Meda leaned in towards Aurelie and whispered with only the most refined of giggles,

“It’s how we start the Universe.”

This did not at all answer Aurelie’s question, much to her loving annoyance, and prompted a reframed follow-up,

“Well ok, but what does it *do*?”

“Do you see these two beams of light here? All this other junk is meant to focus these two beams of the candle’s light into these twin beams, which then can go off to infinity however they would like. They begin as parallel, and they leave the apparatus parallel, and they will presumably continue onto infinity completely parallel to one another, not one inch closer, not one inch further apart from one another: a pious and quite boring kind of eternal dance...”

“Ok...”

“...But, what if they didn’t? What if these two beams, instead of never crossing each other’s paths, what if they touched one another once more? What if these two beams that started parallel, would travel, moving ever closer to one another and then all the sudden *poof!* they finally meet one another.”

“But... that would be a different world wouldn’t it? I mean in our world, the one we are currently inhabiting, with the sea, the storms, and the bubbles... I mean I can *see* with my own eyes the light beams

travel parallel. It wouldn't make sense for them to do otherwise."

"Aurelie, the world is not pre-ordained to exist in any particular way. Whether I met you or you met me, its all perspective, its all interpretation, its all so... arbitrary. There are contradictions all the way down.

Meda turned and looked at the departing light rays as they breached the wall of the enclosure. She breathed in and let go of a sigh.

"You cannot see what I see, and you will never be able to see exactly what I see, but we are not as separated from the Universe as your heart may fear. We are not only within, we are of it. Not even just that, we are it.

*We're nothing more,
and nothing less,
than the Universe*

*gazing upon itself
with childlike wonder,*

*little knots in the fabric of spacetime,
the crests of waves,*

*From the beginnings,
to the ends,
we are made of the stuff of stars.*

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*This is only a prelude.
Here we make a choice.*

*There, we live it.
Infinite stories await.*

I see the rays converge; it is not just
what I believe, it is what I see, it is what
I *feel*.

*And when the Universe
can fully see Herself
reflected in the cosmos,*

*the world will turn in upon itself,
and she will begin to wake up.*

Passion, love, loss, all of that will follow.”

Aurelie sat there stunned at the words emanating out from those wise lips. She looked at her lover with bewilderment, unable to process all the things she was saying, attempting to find a rebuttal, searching every nook and cranny in her mind, and coming up short. What she was saying did not quite make sense, but neither did its negation. After all, how could she be certain of anything?

“My dear Aurelie,
believe in great things.”

And with that, Aurelie looked down at the beams, her vision blurring slightly, the truth of un-resolvability at the most fundamental scales temporarily empowered to the scale of the everyday. The beams began their life in straight lines, perfectly parallel to one another, to travel off to infinity, never to touch, never to unify, never to quite drift away either, but to lie in eternal limbo of too close and not close enough. But now, as Aurelie moved her eyes upwards, the two beams slowly drifted to one another, and they arrived at a point at the top, unified as one. In the air hung a delicate beat of harmony.

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Aurelie blinked and everything about the world changed. It began to turn itself inside out.

Frightened, Aurelie ran outside, briefly abandoning Meda. The world seemed strange... it seemed brighter. The horizon, once a flat line in the sky, now arched back on itself; in the distance she could make out a faint speck upon the cosmic sea. She focused in on this speck which looked strangely familiar, no beyond familiar! It was identical! And after much dismay, she realized that it was the raft she was on, she was seeing herself; the whole world had collapsed in on itself and closed itself off from the rest of ... the rest of *what* Aurelie did not know. And she was not given much of a chance to contemplate.

A wail echoed through the Cosmos, an orchestral groan of dissonance. In a quick instinct, nervous for what this moment was, and overcome with a profound sense of immense dread, Aurelie shouted for Meda, who was still in sight and close enough hold. Or at least, Aurelie thought she was, but the gesture felt like it slowed down in realtime, as though Meda was moving away from her at an immense speed, which didn't feel right. But soon the view of Meda turned even more unnerving as the image of her began to split into two. And then four. And now these four images of Meda, ever so slightly out of sync from one another were encircling an enormous, repulsive black void, freezing Aurelie with the kind of disquiet awe only the most loathsome and magnificent beasts can instill. This void continued to grow ever-larger; now it had nearly reached half of Aurelie's field of view. And the voice of Meda, now scarcely more than unintelligible noise, was beginning to reverberate across the Cosmos alongside its painful roar, as Meda herself grew apparently more and more distant. The bluer colors of the four images of Meda began to fade, as her face appeared redder and redder. Aurelie now understood what was going on, she could feel the flow of her surroundings violently tugging on her in the direction of the great black spot in the sky: the wind finding its way home. This object, whatever it was, was of terrifying weight, dragging spacetime itself around it as it burgeoned.

The kaleidoscope of imagery being dragged around by this beast, continued to multiply in vividness, and divine terror. Now, the black void itself began to shrink as the images of Meda began to fall back through, but there were now even fizzier and more numerous. Whatever

this thing was, it had entered this realm and was now lumbering around underneath the fabric of spacetime. Images wrapped around its now complex and varied shape, reaching Aurelie's eyes at different angles and with different colors. The constellations laid on her face carrying a shriek of divine power orders of magnitude above anything Aurelie could have previously conceived. She felt microscopic against this beast, that it had not a single care in the world for her, that she was but a speck of dust floating through the cosmic wind, destined to fall wherever the laws dictate, and she had not the least bit of power to change her course. But at the same time, a curious thought came over her. Somehow this existential insignificance in the face of this beast wrapped her in a sort of warm blanket. Something about this awful beast, its indifference, its opulence, its power, lifted her up not in the sky, but by constructing a floor by which she could stand. The very presence of this creature, despite its blood-curdling movements (or maybe because of?) provided answers to so many of those deep dreadful questions, or at least assured her that the questions themselves were as meaningless and insignificant as her. She felt somehow safer knowing this monster existed, even if it would eventually spell her demise.

Its tendrils, only visible via the warping of the constellations of static behind (and in front of) it, were winding around the images Meda, now thousands-strong. Aurelie could not understand how many tendrils there were or where they were precisely originating. By now, the distortions eclipsed her entire field of view; no matter where she twisted her head, there was a revolting majesty of multifaceted arrangements. The tides were taking her in every direction at once, twisting, colliding, bashing against one another. But Aurelie's attention soon fell on a particular colorful speck in the upper-left section of her field of view. She turned her eyes to piece it together, as it required some mental vitality to recognize the image. But soon enough, she saw a familiar pale blue glow and recognized her reflection. Except, it wasn't a reflection, for the image had not adjusted its parity: right was still right and left was still left. So if she wasn't looking at a reflection, she must've been looking at herself from behind, but that was impossible. Or at least, it was impossible in the world that she had been equipped to comprehend. This world, even if it was brief in its existence, was wholly alien. And that pit in her stomach began to make itself apparent as she understood the magnitude of what this meant. This creature had bent spacetime so much that she

was able to see her own image, and with only a brief delay. This creature has not just come about in her pocket of the universe but by now must've reached all of its extension. The whole world seemed to grow heavy as the weight of what forbade finally processed. Aurelie had never conceived of what starting the clockwork of the Universe would entail, its entire visage remained a mystery to her, but there was a thought that she swore was directly transmitted by this beast into her mind. Or not so much a thought, but a declaration, a declaration of what will come next, and Aurelie once again grew pale with dread.

By the time she had processed all the stimuli, the sights began converging to her lower-right. The last pocket of undisturbed space now laid marred with disturbance, and grew in brightness. In fact, everything grew in brightness: the images of Meda now became evident and detailed, almost as if she was right there next to Aurelie. The static grew in brilliance and dazzled along the twisting fabric of the cosmos. Aurelie could not believe what she was sensing, the spectacular colors, the effervescent glow that illuminated everything that touched her eyes. *Fortissimo*. Her questions of existence all the sudden felt so menial, as if answers would not lead us anywhere. She laid back and fell into the river, flowing down undisturbed and happy. She needed nothing else in this world, the radiant beauty in all things was enough for her. Annihilation of Self, and peace overcame her. She closed her eyes in exhaustion at this strange moment of tranquility.

But whispers still emanated from the depths, and the uneasiness took her out of sublimation. One with a particularly familiar voice, that of Meda's, somehow able to penetrate this brilliant white world that looked so shut in every direction, her words were clear:

*Starlight, please do not go
gently into the cool waves,*

*Thrash around in love,
in the ecstasy of life.*

*On a day,
in the rain,
far from now,*

*I'll be waiting there for you,
skipping rocks.*

Aurelie couldn't even locate Meda's images anymore, as the world dimmed to obscurity. The two of them had planted the seed for which the Tree of life will spring, and flowers will bloom. *But why? Is it worth the pain?* She did not know the answer to such questions.

For a moment, Aurelie thought that she might've disincorporated, finally leaving this painful realm for something better. But Fate can be cruel sometimes, placing all of our deepest desires right in front of us, and then slashing our legs so we can't move a meter. Aurelie understood this one moment too late. The brilliant white glow of the world dimmed to a luminous blue, and then to a distressing red. Everything instantly became visible to her, everything except that beast which now left no sign of its passage. But all of these were colored with a deep red. Aurelie understood what was going on. All of her fears and anxieties had come to fruition, the moment had passed. Now she felt nothing. Everything she knew and loved, Meda, was now receding away from her, dragged along with the cosmic wind.

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The inflationary period, though short-lived, was perhaps the most terrifying époque in all of the Universe's history. The initial fervor of the event has started to give way to that bleak quietness that accompanies those who have lost faith or hope in all things. Aurelie felt as though her square had been physically cut from the quilt and removed to be placed in the bin. She had not understood why that had to occur, or what exactly *had* happened. She had no contact with Meda; she was now receding away from everything faster than the speed of causality itself, the firmament growing orders of magnitude, doubling the length of the newfound moat rounder every moment. And it kept growing and growing and growing. *This* was the abyss as she had understood it. This was that ugly pit inside of her stomach, turned inside out and placed in front of a mirror. Everything she feared that might happen to her, everything that she feared deep within herself, had now occurred. There was no

hell worse than the moment she found herself in. All these thoughts flashed into her mind, all at once and without proper grammar, during the moments of repulsion. But, as soon as it had begun, it had ended. And now the deep misery set in.

And she was alone once again, although the ocean was a quiet as it had ever been. Every small jostle of her nerves would send a weak and pathetic ripple off to infinity. The sky was dark. And all the colors black. *Had any hope lay in the future? In fact, had anything lay in the future? Was there even a future? What had even occurred? Is this life now?*

Is this... the Universe?

These thoughts and others wove through her mind in simultaneous haste and lethargy. And, in her inability to scream, Aurelie began to hum.

Small little melodies, which would bring her anguish and guilt and nostalgia (oh the sweet painful nostalgia!), as they helped hold her darkness back, just a little bit. She continued for some time, floating there alone, using the last of her energy to sing away her sorrows, to craft as beautiful a sunset of herself as she could. The flower that once so beautifully bloomed, had now begun to wilt. She would see this world out, not on the bleak soundlessness, but the last chord to resolve this strange prelude. Aurelie understood she was in her final moments, or at least this particular iteration of herself. She did not want to continue. She wanted to sleep for the long winter, without knowing if she would or even could wake up. She did not want to feel the anguish anymore, she just wanted to be able to breathe, without holding up a mountain. She wanted Meda. She wanted to be anywhere but here. She craved oblivion.

She reflected on the life she had lived so far, the warm moments spent in company, the awe and proofed curiosity she felt, the memories that slowly fade away to the sands of time. All this threaded with the beautiful hums of a lost soul, who never asked to come into existence, whose every moment could be hailed as a triumph over the darkness, who spent millennia alone inside her head because the world cared even less for her. Tears shed out of happiness, out of despair, out of relief, if even for a small moment, begun to fall. *Is this all that life has to offer? Are we doomed to float alone in this painfully placid sea? Love can only carry*

us so far, can it? Love is only possible when we have others to share it with. Aurelie could remember the color of love with the melodies, with Meda. She lamented the future memories she had dreamt of, failing to come into existence themselves.

The memories now floated down the lazy river, between the blades of wild grass, and around the corner, beneath the horizon, and now they are gone. *What is a life without memories? What is an existence without each other?* All that mattered now vanished. The scaffolding holding her up above the black hole of nihilistic despair evaporated. The black abyss was swallowing her whole. Her anguished face no longer cried of despair, it now had on it a face of indifference, indifferent to her suffering, indifferent to the Universe. She was too exhausted now. The rings of the final lights slowly wondered to the front of her vision and she felt the whisper of the end.

But consciousness is a funny thing. It's a bit like matter, in the sense that it can't be full removed from the fabric of the World, nor can we make more of it. We can only move it around from one place to another, shifting sands, crashing waves. The melodies are all within us. From the beginnings of the Universe to its endings, we are crafted from the stars. Aurelie understood this, as Meda had shown her. She understood that as the void engulfed her, She would not completely cease to be. Her pieces would be scattered, crashing into one another, in an thousand million stories.

At this moment of acceptance, of this painful, beautiful feeling of knowing these memories will never exist again but did in fact exist before, and brought so much love and joy along with them, she could hear the quiet melodies behind her. She turned to face the music, and a faint murmur saw her out.

*Her body to become the Milky Way,
and her dreams placed in Andromeda.*

*The two racing towards one another
to embrace once again.*

No being currently alive on Earth, nor likely any being reading this text will ever witness such a grand reunion. Our bodies will have long been turned to dust, our egos dissolved back into the sea. But we will

always be woven into the fabric the pervades all of existence, sailing on the boundless and bottomless ocean of being, listening to the hum of a world lost in time, lost within ourselves.