

50013

the finger tender



5210

I am waiting. I have been enclosed in this vessel for a spell of nameless duration. Here, eternity shies away, bowing out humbled by the mere sight of my ornate chamber, my cell. I am waiting for her in this place before the named, before brilliance and darkness become sisters.

Who is she, you might ask? That I cannot tell you. But I can tell you about myself. I am, or used to be, a tender in service to our Lady. My given name was Cōnus Zephirum but in the holy hangars, the Blessed Tending Chambers, I was known only as 50013. I worked the odd-number shifts as a groomer in one of the endless temple halls, honoured with the station of serviceman first class; my brethren and I were responsible for dispersing, removing, and transferring the three divine qualities of efflorescence or runoff from one of her many hands. This temple section's complement was blessed with the task of grooming the smallest finger of one of her right hands.

Centred on all four walls, between the Monstratem Divinus fixtures that held the "Occultus Santus" or Great Veil, were the balconies where we tenders waited, two teams in each, positioned head to head to allow easy communication and coordination of our efforts in dispersing the efflorescence cast from the veiled chamber in which she materialized.

While waiting for her I would silently admire the exorbitant beauty of everything that surrounded me. Every object, every implement, every tender was matched, tooled, and crafted to be as decorative as it or he was useful by what can only be known as the unspeakable. Gems, black onyx, and gold decorated the gothic architecture of the halls. Lavish embroidery made splendid the tenders' black protective uniforms. Ornate deflective armour fashioned from precious metals complemented the round spectacles that shielded our eyes.

We tended the Great Veil she crafted with impeccable care and veneration. We routinely performed bare hand inspections as well as etheric and lens-scope scrutiny, and could see that the fibres were woven into patterns that in themselves were also made up of smaller identical ones, repeated into the most minute scale. We did this inspection to ensure the Veil was intact, though we never found any imperfection whatsoever. How something as indestructible as the Veil could ever lose its integrity remained a mystery.

We performed our service when our Lady was resting, taking a moment to be still during her great work. Only one thing was more rewarding than seeing the crystal beacon signals fire up, telling us of her impending arrival, and that was the sequential light and sound of section notification lumens that directed us in our tasks. The Massah orchestrated the undulating movements of the energy clearings and our work became a dance of light, sound, and service. I had never been happier or more joyous. But that was not my destiny.

While in the Blessed Hangar, one soon realizes why our ruling motto states *Totus Res Es Possible Comprehendo Irritum*—”All Things Are Possible Including Nothingness.” As we must not only accept and prepare for the unfathomable, so must we be in service empty of passion, thought, and self-concept.

The slightest utterance during the removal of the efflorescence in her presence could be catastrophic to the tenders. We were forbidden to wield the tiniest arc or flints or even the most minute threads of smoke from the runoff of the Great Veil that shrouded her resting form. I witnessed many times the appearance of horrible beasts and malformed objects of the foulest order.

A tender lost his composure while chasing an elusive wisp of smoke. Before we could hear the sound in his breath, a dancing yfle leaped into his mouth. Taking root in his throat, it grew to thirty cubits, crushing its host and fusing itself to several tenders before we could inject lumenium into its still materializing form. Besides rendering the aberration benign and ending its expansion, the lumenium allowed us to dispose of the lurid thing by dissolving and aspirating it into the conduits.

I beheld other strange happenings, including the unthinkable—a breach of the Great Veil during a grooming, when a ray of her brilliance, no larger than a strand of hair, cut a hole through the chamber wall. Its holy beam destroyed several temple supply ships in orbit, then continued unaffected to obliterate several hundred planets that were caught in its path before the Massah brought the existence of the breach to her attention. She sealed the breach from the inside. We could only speculate that the great work that day must have been most glorious, to produce the quality of runoff that could effect a breach. The Great Veil was our shield and it protected the tenders and all of creation in our parsec of the great art. Nothing

in creation could behold her brilliance directly. Any object or being so exposed would simply cease to be.

Please know that the great diligence of empty mindfulness which banishes fear, detaches emotion, and protects and honours the station, also allows us to continue serving her for as long as fate has a gentle hand with us. In my case, it was with regret that I had to withdraw from my station. I have failed to uphold the motto and I have fallen in love with her. I did not hold empty-mindfulness in the act of service.

This did not happen all at once, but came about gradually. My desire grew hand in hand with the images that spring forth from the arcs, flint, and smoke of the efflorescence, which found their way into my mind's eye. It was then that the runoff began to speak to me, and it was also then that my heart began to ache.

Images of fantastical lands and creatures whispered and taunted me to listen, capturing my wonder; soon I was a slave to their tales of her great work. I was given visions of countless galaxies, stars, and planets where civilizations came into being and, to my horror, were subsequently snuffed out, destroyed with what seemed less effort than blowing out a candle. No sooner had I fallen into grief than joy would strike anew, as I witnessed a new and beautiful image—the budding of consciousness; I watched its innate knowing of its mystical morphology as it keenly conquered challenge after challenge, adapting to every opportunity. I was not long in this vista before it turned to madness, and I saw mothers giving birth, then eating their young; I watched displaced souls from various disasters and ill-fated happenings replanted elsewhere, to futures unknowable.

Mortified and delighted beyond my wildest imaginings, I became sleepless and restless as my fantasies fused with the visions. I hungered to know that all was right and well in the Great Work, that all had meaning, that I had meaning beyond my station. In her brilliance the highest truth resided, the source of all hope and of all love itself. I wanted her more than my own life, more than anything with which the visions could seduce or frighten me.

Before starting a tour of service, I was discovered kissing a drawing I had secretly made of her, displayed on the door of the closet wherein hung my vestments, under which I had placed a rose—an offering to a graven image.

I had been so careful not to let anyone, even my closest brother, know of its existence. But that day my love for her had become unbridled. I revelled in my feeble desire, naked and raw—I wanted her. I sealed my fate by throwing reason and sanity to the wind, oblivious to my surroundings.

I was taken to the high council; the temple administrators informed the Massah who in turn related the tale to our Lady. Within the hour, I received a letter in a box. Everyone knew of the box—it was known as the coffin, as it resembled the container in which tenders were placed. I was warned that, upon opening the enchanted box, if my mouth moved as if to speak, my life would end immediately, before a syllable could be conceived. This communication was for my eyes only.

I read:

Dearest child of wonder and innocence. I am flattered by your expression of love for me and your desire to know who I am. But a drawing that you point to with your lips is not that of anyone, including myself. My nature is a process, and if your wish is to truly know me with every fibre of your essence, you will have to come up to the task.

I shall grant you one of two choices. The first would be death in flesh and in spirit. This merciful fate will free you of the great suffering that will only grow as you wander aimlessly through the roads of eternity, chained to the guise of a diluted ghost, separate and isolated, trying helplessly to find me. The other path I offer you is to take my hand. In our embrace I will burn away all the images you think or conceive of as being a likeness of me, forever. This, my love, is the only way your lips can truly touch my own.

And so my path now leads me to the chamber of the void, where I will be placed in a cell in the likeness of her message's chariot until such time that she will need my unique qualities, and I will become her intimate servant. I will be a seed in her garden of universes. And there I will embrace all forms she places against me and light all shadow she dances before me, burning all illusions of her in the flames I have sparked into being. Embracing her in the gallery where she paints with fear and love, deceit and truth, I will be with her without end and without beginning.

“Are you ready, my love?” I hear her whisper to me.

“Yes, my Lady,” I answer humbly, and I immediately begin glowing a brilliant white. My light makes my prison transparent, and I am now free. I can hear her, as if she is standing close by my side.

She again speaks: **“There is something I want to show you.”**

She transports me to a place I never thought I would see. I am high above the temple, looking down from the emptiness of space. As I marvel at the perfect sphere, I recognize it as the temple where I fell in love with her. Towering gables grace its mosaic surface—a sublime balance of both ornament and utility. I never knew what happened to the sacred effluence once it had been harvested by the brethren. Now I see it radiating from the tower heights, forming geometric patterns, connecting seamlessly to the unseen. Even while she rested she created.

She senses my question as if she’s been waiting for it to bloom, expecting it to sprout from deep within me. She answers me as it forms. **“Yes, dearest light. I celebrate creation and support its every wish.”** While she speaks my vista accelerates away from the temple. I am able to glimpse a horizon created by other temple spheres as they all recede and become but a speck. **“I lie still within the perfection of the great work, sleeping and dreaming in it so all the beings of creation can in turn sleep and dream, allowing them to journey beyond their conscious knowing.”** I see atoms and molecules pass from behind my mind’s eye. Still she speaks: **“And in so doing I am in all things.”**

Then she is silent. Cells form out of the froth of energy. Then a crimson colour gives way to the details of a petal. I recognize it immediately. It is part of the rose I placed on the door of my vestment closet—the drawing is gone, but the rose remains. An overwhelming emotion strikes me, something beyond what I thought love could ever be. It swells in me and overtakes me completely. An ache pushes forward from deep within, directing me to dare finish with her words that now will to be my own, spoken aloud: **“And all things are within me.”**

At that moment, I feel the urge to scream and weep.

The darkness returns. Once again I find myself looking at my cell from the outside. From here I witness my body, still within the ornate box. Silently I feel an intolerable pressure build, first in my feet and hands, then creeping into my abdomen to meet the emotions in my chest. What once was my flesh now desires to push out, to rip itself away. Rays of brilliance break through my glowing form. Time seems to slow. I feel that I have begun to explode in every sense possible.

Bursting forth in an ever-expanding torrent of blinding fire and debris, racing in all directions through the void, what was once my body has become a well of inconceivable energy. Waves of matter flow from my mind's eye, and I now discern shapes and material ebbing and flowing as it coagulates into countless galaxies and worlds.

Time speeds and slows through aeons where consciousness grows from dust and fire, swimming, crawling, and walking, hungry for metamorphosis; pushing through, it revels in the hunt, the battle, and the dance of lovers in a myriad of species. I am struck still in a sublime moment of silence, where I have become a child's gasp, its first breath of air, its cry.

I lie as innocence strewn across a woman's arms, held close to her bosom; she does not give me a name. Falling silent and peaceful, I am drawn to listen as her voice sings to me a lullaby:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star

How I wonder what you are!

Up above the world so high,

Like a diamond in the sky,

Twinkle, twinkle, little star

How I wonder what you are.

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