

# *The Triangulation of Dari*



*A tribute, from the desk of Chaobang  
2020 and 2023 CE*



*The Triangulation of Dari*, a tribute to Dari, was the very first of the present author's writings for her and her friends. The original version was published in 2020 CE by Darkarri, with whom Dari is associated in this world, on the author's behalf. This second version, with minor corrections and updated illustrations, is published digitally in 2023 CE by Chaobang on [www.aichaobang.com](http://www.aichaobang.com) as part of the Dari Cycle of stories.

Text and illustrations Copyright © Chaobang, 2023 CE. Dari and Eclipse belong to themselves. Any errors in their representation are the author's alone.

The author has made this work available free of charge for all people. Permission is granted for its reproduction, distribution and fair use on condition that it is presented intact, uncensored, free of charge, and attributed to the author and original site of publication at [www.aichaobang.com](http://www.aichaobang.com).

Enormously potent mythic energies are at play in the affairs related herein. Tread with care.

# The Triangulation of Dari

*Hiding the small in the large seems fitting, but you still lose. But if you hid the world in the world, you would have nothing to lose. This is the essence of what lasts. You trespass on human form and still delight in it. As a human, you can change ten thousand times without ever reaching the limit. Can you count the different things that have made you happy?*

**Zhuangzi, c. 300 BCE**

The first thing she felt as she stepped through the rift was the chill. She shivered, sleeveless in her light green top, and wrapped her arms around herself for warmth. All the same she wasted not an instant in scanning her new surroundings.

The subdued lavender hues of the sky, thickening to magenta near the horizon on the sea of clouds, seemed to confer their softness on the smooth gusts that brushed against her skin. It was a gentle chill, pressing down like a blanket of cool mountain air. A good chill.

It appeared there wasn't much here, and in the space of a few heartbeats she had taken in enough for the apprehension that always accompanied her into a new reality – and for good reason – to subside into momentary relief. The young woman's eyes for her surroundings were defter than her years might suggest, for the typical tenor of her adventures had given her excellent reason to learn to get her bearings fast and take in every detail while she could.

“What is this place...?”

From what she could tell, she stood near the peak of a small rocky outcrop or mountain summit, which emerged from a cloudlike ocean that stretched as far as the eye could see. It was only some hundred yards to the top, where some manner of pillared pavilion gleamed in the yellow light of a pale little sun.

The explorer's spirits rose. The recent worlds had been challenging. Not challenging in that onerous sense she had most come to expect, for once, yet stressful in their encounters all the same. There had been tarantulas. Massive fuzzy fellows. They were friendly enough, but when they nuzzled at her their hair had come off on her skin, causing hours of furious itching. Such things were known to happen though, so the tranquility of the present landscape washed cool relief into the heart of this miniaturised yet ever-intrepid wanderer of the worlds

(etc.), known – at least to those who bothered to ask prior to indulging in temptations that compromised communication – as Dari.

“I don’t think I’ve been to this one before. This is beautiful.”

She scanned the area again, slowly and thoroughly this time as she turned on the spot in a full circle. She noted the occasional bird-like creature gliding in the distance, the odd little shape arcing out and back into the clouds, but no sign, for a change, of people, still less of impending gigantic appendages or apertures. A relief. A place of rest, to soak a while in a bizarre and beautiful landscape before poking around for whatever dimensional rifts hereabouts might bring her back towards more familiar realities, where to properly unwind and get some notes down on her latest discoveries.

Her eyes fell again on that white structure, conspicuous against the earthy colours of the rocks and those haunting blues and purples that soaked the sky. Curiosity got the better of her and she scrambled up the crags and boulders that covered the short distance to the pavilion. Once upon a time such rough terrain might have been a challenge for her, but those days were an era away now, part of a former life she wasn’t sorry to leave behind. Her stamina had steadily improved, and her limbs grown strong, although she knew this was less because of her renewed commitments to exercise (having worked out early on that fitness was indispensable to the way of life thrust upon her), and rather more because, it could be said, exercise tended to happen to her. It was a pointless endeavour to estimate the amount of time her wayfaring had required her to run for her life, negotiate extremely narrow topographies, or wrestle with all her tiny might against loads hundreds or thousands of times more massive than herself. Of course there was never a prospect of overcoming such an unfair discrepancy when placed in that duress; so the usual result was that she had to remain in it for a very long time, and could not deny, if grudgingly, that at least from a calisthenic point of view her arm and leg muscles had derived some merit from the trouble.

Today at least it saw her attain that edifice on the peak with a minimum of effort, returning already to resting pulse as she clambered the last of the way.

“Ooh. What a weird structure...”

She ran a fingertip up and down the nearest pillar. It was smooth and cool to the touch, reminded her of marble, save that its white surface was totally, almost suspiciously plain: no swirls or veins or other markings of note. The structure was large – or she was small, she reminded herself – with a domed roof supported by these pillars perhaps some thirty metres high, although the far side was pillarless and open to the air. And in the centre, some altar-shaped platform with objects arranged about it.

A well-worn apprehensive instinct awakened in her mind. “Careful, Dari...” she muttered to herself.

There was writing on the side of the platform. Shimmering cobalt letters or runes of some description, engraved on the material or – this felt strange –

projected upon them by some device, some magic, or some optical trick? Dari had picked up smatterings of dozens of languages in her wanderings but here was a script she had never encountered. The harder she stared at it, the more certain she felt it changed its shape each time she blinked; and yet she found she understood it perfectly, as though with a familiarity she had carried all her life.

‘REST, TRAVELLER – YOU ARE LOVED’, it read.

A voice in the corner of her consciousness, so faint yet compressed by hard experience to an iron resolve, yelled: No! Don’t trust it! But such was the tranquility of this world, so fresh the air and so comforting this pavilion’s aesthetic that Dari brushed those warnings aside. Elsewhere she might have heeded them, but she felt such alluring honesty embedded into every shape and shade of the place she had found herself in. The message on the sign alone spoke warmth to her on a calendar of both hours and historical eras.

Upon the platform sat a wide and elegant washbasin; Dari looked and saw her face reflected in the crystalline water therein. There was also a ruddy clay pitcher – terracotta, she guessed – no doubt containing more of the same, along with a tray of upturned drinking mugs each sculpted of the same material. But the most inviting thing by far was a vast plate of what looked like chocolate biscuits. Not small ones, either.

“Oh, now we’re talking!”

Dari couldn’t resist a goofy smile. REST, TRAVELLER – YOU ARE LOVED: everything about this setup seemed to exude those cheering words. Before she could help it she found herself pouring a mug of that water whose liberating icy freshness streamed so readily down her throat. She splashed more of it over her face and arms from the basin, whereupon a few residual tarantula hairs fell and stuck on the water’s surface. The biscuits looked irresistible. She knew she shouldn’t, for so many reasons, not least because in spite of all her efforts, not to mention the concerned hospitality of friends who (let us say) had taught her a thing or two about nutrition, she felt she had yet to achieve a reasonably varied diet. Still – there are no circumstances in which one says no to chocolate biscuits. She figured it might at least be sensible to break one first to check how it looked inside, but it turned out to look much as a biscuit should, so she gave it a nibble, found its flavour incredible, and made short work of the rest of it.

Four biscuits later a refreshed and energised Dari wandered across to where the pavilion opened out and stretched her arms with a satisfied yawn. There was a stronger wind on this side, but the view was breathtaking. What secrets lay beneath or beyond those endless clouds? The ruins of ancient civilisations, perhaps? Surely someone lived here; biscuits like that don’t bake themselves. She made a mental note to find a way back some time for a proper look around, but for now, as she sat then lay on the soft ochre earth on the clifftop, it was time for a last spell of rest before a return to cosy companionships and written reflections.

She shut her eyes. So peaceful; no sound but the shuffle of the cloud-filled sea. Life was too claustrophobic sometimes, too stiffening on the joints or blistering on the skin; too often did the pounding chorus of animate noise from all directions drive her to distraction. How bracing, for once, to feel the freedom of the open air.

She opened her eyes to find her vision consumed by a colossal outstretched hand (hot pink, manicured, nine inches) descending upon her, long and sturdy fingers closing in. A start – then a muffled yelp as her world compressed in a vast, fragrant darkness.

## 食

*Finally. Got you!*

“Mmmph!”

Dari was no stranger to this predicament. She wriggled and squirmed as the unmistakable heel of a palm muffled her cries. These prey-like instincts were deeply ingrained, no matter how many times such things happened they always overcame her and she knew they probably always would.

In long moments with not much else she could do – and in these she was not impoverished – she had oft wandered through her own mind in search of some long-lost explanation. Perhaps she had been a bunny in a previous cycle of reincarnation. Or maybe some fundamentalist priest had put a spell on her at birth, to make her feel awed into submission by other women and thus prevent her growing up to be attracted to them (an attempt which, if true, could only be judged a spectacular failure). Or, it had once been suggested to Dari that she had an Irish ancestor who might or might not have been the chieftain of a great Gaelic clan; in which case, perhaps he had broken some terrible *geas*, by which one of that heritage’s formidable goddess figures had forbidden him from entering a red house after passing three red things or something after that manner.

The point was moot. A fact she had found more use for was that since the fateful night she was shrunk and swallowed whole in an incident in her university study lounge, then escaped through the rifts between realities that said incident had left her the ability to perceive, her appropriation by gigantic women had grown into such a habitual occurrence that she was at last learning to establish a grip on her higher consciousness in the midst of them (that is, of both the occurrences and the women themselves): a tenuous presence of mind which, nonetheless, could make all the difference in anticipating, if not mitigating, the trials to come.

A voice loaded with elegant authority seemed to reverberate into her and tickle along her fastened body.

*Shhh, hold still, you sweet little thing. By the stars, do you always squirm so much? Mm...if you keep this up, there are places I should invite you to put those motions to better use...*

Dari shuddered, for by now she was well-versed in the implications of statements like those. But clutching for all she was worth on that alert corner of her brain, she had already noticed two unusual things.

One: this was a terrifyingly massive hold she was in. Not only in terms of the size of the hand, which in practice, as far as gigantic women were concerned, only really came in one setting: *far too mmmfing big*. Here she felt something more. Some incredible weight clutched around her tighter even than those fingers, and saturated her senses at a level that somehow transcended the physicality of their heft.

Two: that voice. Its tone was gentle, playful, but – this was significant – measured. At least then she might not be one of the more psychotic ones, Dari thought, and thank goodness for that if so, but what was really odd about her speech was that it seemed to arrive not through her ears but directly into every cell of her body. The sensation was so bizarre that she felt present enough to wonder about it even as her instincts floundered in their well-trodden trepidation at being lifted away, that first foreboding phase in these encounters which, she had learnt, always, that is, absolutely always presaged much warmer, wetter and tighter ordeals in her immediate future.

*You can open your eyes now, my cute little friend. Come on – don't be scared. I won't bite.*

That was little consolation for the passenger, for whom teeth as such had never been the concern.

The motion had stopped, but a thumb and three curled fingers – her feet didn't even reach the fourth – clasped her body fast. Still washing ashore on the waves of her adrenaline, Dari wrenched her eyelids open.

The facts flew in fast as her observing instincts kicked in. This was a dimly-lit environment; she knew this because her eyesight needed no time to adjust, which usually it did when emerging into light after an enclosed ferrying. Her body was grasped horizontal – no, angled upward, about sixty degrees – so that her face stared out of the top end of that hand-tunnel straight at a pair of colossal pink hemispheres, heaving mightily to dominate her field of view. Those fearsome highlands nestled in the window of an elegant outfit that was in places sleek jet-black like the darkest night, and in others a composite of colourful stripes, curves and – emblems? Decorations? Velvet? Cleavage...

With a strenuous internal struggle, Dari wrested her gaze off that visual singularity, resisting the waft of its pheromones which, her nose registered, were extraordinarily strong. Averting her eyes from such places was an urgent reflex, forged under the hammer-blows of her regular experience of a cosmic principle that in the classrooms of some worlds is taught as Dari's Fourth Law: whose gist,

in lay terms, is that to look in it is to get put in it. (In fact the operative dynamic is less the looking itself and more that of *getting caught looking* by the bearer of the geography concerned, who is thereby given a convenient pretext to send the guilty surveyor on an expedition.) And with nowhere to go but up, Dari's gaze made contact with a pair of massive indigo irises so intense in blazing radiance that her own eyelids slammed shut in trepidation.

"Ohh no," she grimaced. "It's a goddess, right? Of course it's another goddess. Why? Just why? They have such crazy ideas of fun, and then it gets even worse because each one doesn't like it when she finds out the others have had me, oh no, no...I'm so in for it, aren't I? Of all the millions of tinies they can reach to stick in their places one by one, why always me? It's all my fault again, isn't it! What the heck was I thinking, taking her water and biscuits? That must have been, I dunno, her altar or something!"

*Hee hee. You're allowed to look at me you know. Look wherever you like. You are as much the sovereign of your gaze as I am of mine.*

Dari almost didn't dare, but her apprehension found itself outweighed – just – by a curiosity at that peculiar choice of words, still vibrating into her skin from every angle.

She looked, coming face to massive face again with those blistering pupils. They were no less redoubtable for the second attempt. Had she ever seen a pair of eyes like these? The sheer force of their regard could probably have suspended her dangling in the air, or else sucked her in, like purple whirlpools, all the way back to the beginning of whatever universe this was that had joined her long list of problem destinations.

"Eep! Definitely a goddess!" she squeaked, clenching her eyelids again.

*Did you like the biscuits?*

"Nnn! She's going to eat me, and because she's a goddess she'll eat me again and again and again..."

Dari felt herself lifted higher, still clutched tight, but a gentle wind now blew across her face. It felt fresh and cool, not at all unlike like the wind on that mountaintop, she realised. It bore a soothing quality, a soft yet irresistible weightiness that squeezed on her cheeks and forehead and swept some of her lengthy chestnut hair in front of her face.

Taken aback, she risked a peek again. She squealed to find herself before an immense pair of lips (well-hydrated dark magenta, full, plush but firm in outline, slightly parted where she was blowing on me, corners raised into a smile because she's looking forward to eating me...!) and with no escape on offer, attempted to wriggle backwards, deeper into the entity's hand.

*Hey, I mean it. Did you like the biscuits?*

"I-I'm sorry!" Dari blurted out. "I thought it was – I didn't mean to –"

*Tasty, weren't they? They better have been. I imported them specially for you.*

"I promise, never again, I...what?"



The fingers unlocked, leaving her cupped in the palm of the mystery who, as the landscape swept open, now confronted her in full and awesome grandeur. Instantly Dari curled away in that basin of soft rosy skin as shockwaves of incredible pressure crashed upon her form, and she dug herself in, burying her face in the sweet musk which seemed to waft from that surface to coil her up in an otherworldly power of its own, such that it was not for several minutes that she realised, to her embarrassment, that her collector had yet to even do anything to her. She was definitely a woman of some description, and not, for instance, some horrendous galactic abomination in disguise; she knew that from her intuitive sense of Dari's Second Law. But then, one could also observe that a sabretoothed tiger was definitely a cat, or a falling moon with an angry face was definitely a rock, which might have likewise omitted the most useful information when such things loomed upon your unfortunate head. Dari's sense of pressure came purely from the radiances of power, passion and will hurled out by the charisma of this giantess's bearing, none of which her calamitous size alone could account for (and Dari would know).

Dari.

"Nnnn!"

Dari!

An index finger introduced itself beneath the curled-up arch of the flustered little traveller and gently but unstopably unrolled her onto her back.

"Who are you? H-How do you know my name?!"

*Everyone knows your name, little Dari. You have made the acquaintance of – mmm – some rather powerful women of late, haven't you? News is quick to spread at these levels of all-that-exists. Mm...you might find that worth keeping under consideration.*

The fingertip unbent her arms then prodded her knees straight, its lustrous nail startling Dari further with a glimpse of her hapless reflection.

Her mind raced. It was true that as the range of her interdimensional wanderings had widened, she had started to attract the attentions of women on quite frightening scales of cosmic influence, whose methods with her, if frequently innovative, let us say, were not so different, fundamentally speaking, from the many women who were not technically goddesses but whose uses for their size had anyway wrecked any framework Dari might once have had for theological classification.

"Everyone knows my name? Oh n-no..."

As that finger pulled away, the great eyes and lips that had overwhelmed her imagination at last receded into the context of a relatable face. Dari gasped. A mane of lush jet-black hair, cascading wild and free like waterfalls in flight; a pair of lilac horns that rose from those streams on high, not actually all that sizeable, yet curved into arcs with a subtle gravitas of their own; the menacing prowl of a tongue, its tip emerging for a brisk lick of those dreaded lips; then once more

Dari's gaze was drawn to those eyes, those pools of penetrating flame which pinned her like a bug with their undivided attention. Dari's own wide eyes gaped back, compelled to peer into those depths, expecting them to flood her in the haughty contempt or objectifying relish she associated with beings of such power. (Although, statistically speaking, both in general experience and that of Dari herself, this was perhaps unfair: gods tend on the whole to be no worse than mortals, it's just that also like mortals, the more disagreeable ones tend to be noisier).

"Are y-you really a goddess then?"

*Mm. That depends. Do you want me to be?*

"Um. That doesn't sound like something a g-goddess would ask. Ah! N-No offence!"

The maybe-a-goddess appeared amused as she toweringly regarded the young woman in her hand. Whatever it was she wanted of Dari, she seemed in no hurry to get it. Perhaps she was still building her appetite, or was just remarkably patient. Neither scenario was of much reassurance; Dari knew beings like this were inclined to flexible concepts of time. Nor did such added time improve her chances of escape, which she had generally given up on after learning the hard way that such attempts only led to tighter and more embarrassing confinements.

*But what is godhood then, little Dari? Why don't you tell me?*

Dari opened her mouth but failed arrange her thoughts through it. What was she meant to say in a situation like this?

*For instance: is power the measure of divinity, in which case each woman you have – mhmm – experienced might count as an example of it? Or, must that power be used in a righteous manner to earn legitimacy with you, in which case I expect you might feel a little disinclined to recognise a few among them? Would the same principle make your best friends goddesses for the benevolence with which they have treated you, or does the very fact that you relate to them on the equal basis of loving friendship – not to mention that one of them is a variant cosmic phenotype of yourself – disqualify them from godhood? Conversely, if, hypothetically, some unscrupulous individual demanded you worship her on pain of death, but you refused, what terms would remain to consider her a goddess if, on eliminating you, she had no-one left in relation to whom to exercise that power?*

Dari felt paralysed. The mysterious giantess's words were like a battery of extra fingers, brushing and tapping her round and around in her palm.

*Oh little Dari. Surely you of all people know that an individual's godhood is decided not by herself, but by the consent of others to regard her so. Whether I tell you I am a goddess or not makes no difference: that decision is entirely for you. Does this satisfy you?*

But Dari's concern was not on whether her question had received a satisfactory answer, because the operative effect of that unexpected philosophising had been

to shake her out of her stupor. Her nerves at last began to settle, allowing her to take in this Schrodinger's Goddess or whatever she was in full now, or at least as completely as the angle of her palm allowed. Gosh she was intimidating – and that's okay, Dari told herself. It's okay to feel intimidated in a giant woman's hand. Deep breaths. Slow. My word, what the heck is that outfit?

Trying so hard not to catch the notice of that precipitous bosom, her eyes explored an ensemble that seemed to integrate characteristics of a bespoke military dress and the garb of some mistress of the moonlight who slips through the dusk. No: *flies* through the dusk – Dari could see them now. Wings. Wreathed in shadows by the muted light of this chamber, and partially obscured by a brilliant blue cloak rimmed with gold; nonetheless, the shape of those sturdy bone frames (if that was bone), those velvety membranes, was unmistakable.

Part of Dari thought: beautiful. But not in a singular sense of beautiful, more a whole mix of them that overlapped in mystifying ways. The soft beauty of love, and the hard beauty of will: both were present, enormous, and staggering in the weight with which their catch felt crushed by their attention.

Dari had seen a few things by now, and the words escaped her mouth before she could stop them. “A...s-succubus?”

*Now then. That's a more interesting supposition.* The finger returned and began to smooth out the mess all this handling had made of Dari's hair. *Hm. You wouldn't be entirely wrong. Then again, that word has such a problematic inheritance for your former people. You however have gone where they have not, so I would trust you know better of it.*

Do I? Dari thought. Three encounters with succubi shot to the front of her memory, propelled by the outstanding forthrightness with which she remembered them plucking her up out of nowhere, through rifts of a kind she had still not learnt to detect, and summarily cramming her in every place they could fit her without a second thought.

She trembled. “No! W-Wait, please –”

*Oh relax.* The fingertip nuzzled the side of her face, annoyingly. *You might reconsider your assumptions after enjoying my company.*

Totally bewildered now, Dari felt her fuse beginning to wear thin. Was her captor a goddess, or a succubus, or something else entirely? What did she want with her? Had she been scooped away just as she thought she could relax in order to be sat down like this and driven out of her mind with riddles and circular questions? She began to wish the whatever-she-was would swallow her now and get it over with so she could go on.

“Look – you – I mean – what was all that about, with the mountain and the biscuits and all of that? I thought it might be just one of those ancient pocket dimensions I've been stumbling upon; the ones that seem to have been laid out long ago as rest stops for travellers. It was such a pleasant one too! But then, h-how did you reach me there?”

The gigantic one giggled. Actually giggled. Dari found her mind put at ease a fraction, but then realised that no, actually this was winding her up. Being put to prurient physical use was one thing, but when she felt they were playing psychological games at her expense? That could really grind at her nerves.

*Hey, I had no intent to upset you.* The giantess cast Dari a sympathetic glance, but finding her face extremely unconvinced, indeed verging hazardously close to a sulk, she quickly snapped her fingers around the tiny girl, whereupon curling her up tight, she jiggled their tips like pistons into her palm.

“Mmmff! Mmmmmffff!”

*Aaww, there you go. Doesn't that feel better than getting grumpy?*

All Dari's pique evaporated in an instant as the mashing digits returned her to bunny-rabbit mode. She squeaked and struggled as her captress carried her a few paces in that manner, re-emerging all ruffled and red-faced when the hand opened again.

*There – look. That's where I caught you. Not one of those ancient waystations, I'm afraid; though your research on those intrigues me and I would take great delight in discussing your findings some time. For now, I am elated enough that you found it pleasant.*

“That, there...n-no way...”

Peering over the relaxed thumb that had just been massaging the top of her head, she found herself gazing out on a circular tabletop-basin covered in cloudy vapours. A miniature rock jutted out at the centre with a toy-like white pavilion on top. The giantess's other hand made a circular motion in Dari's peripheral vision, and some illusions switched on: tiny specks flapping over the surface, or bobbing in and out of the sea of clouds.

“You – you tricked me?”

*By no means! I lured you. 'Tricked' makes it sound like I baited you with duplicitous conduct. Yet I never designed it to specifically resemble a waystation – that was your inference – and everything was genuine, from the food and drink to the little note I left for you. The sky is projected by mirrors from the actual sky outside – look there, see? It's even got that little fellow there, our elderly sun. And I'll have you know this rock was flown from one of the finest mountains in this world.*

“But – but why? Why me? And why like this?”

*I have had cause to watch you for a long time now, little Dari. You may choose whichever reason best satisfies you. The one I will be registering in my archives is that you have come into capacities and characteristics of cosmic significance, which I have decided warrant my urgent investigation in the interest of all love-capable life.*

The prodigious figure stopped to give Dari a chance to reply, but found her flabbergasted.

“Cosmic...significance? Me? That's...not how it usually goes...”

*The other reason, which is not in conflict with the first and whose familiarity might be of greater comfort to you, is that you are a sweet and adorable creature and it was high time we got to know each other better.*

There it is, Dari thought. Back in familiar territory. But still, she couldn't shake what she had just heard. She scrambled onto her rear, backed up to the base of those giant fingers and put her arms round her knees.

"Look, um...miss succubus-goddess-person. I'm a little uneasy about being tricked – I mean, *lured* – out of my way and just picked up like this. However much it happens I never really get used to it, so I'm sorry. But, I don't think I've ever met anyone like you, and there's something here that's not like what I've come to expect. Something that feels...big; well, bigger than usual, and more than a little intimidating. From the start you already knew my name. You knew about my wandering around, you knew about my, um, problems, you knew about my friends, you even know how much I like chocolate biscuits, and on top of all that I'm not used to feeling people's voices come echoing into me like this, or this sharp sense that you can hear what's going on in my head from moment to moment. It feels like you're seeing right through me, which is frankly unnerving as hell."

Was that a blush on the maybe-a-goddess's cheek? Her pink colouration made it hard to tell.

*Mmm, yes. Yes! Oh my sweet little Dari, I'll confess: that perspicacity is part of what has so endeared you to me. You'll roll and squeak and wiggle around in my hand, but underneath you're constantly taking things in and putting the pieces together.*

"But just who are you? Do you – do you have a name?"

*I have many names. But that is not the interesting question here. The interesting question is: who are you?*

"Um...but you know that. I'm Dari. Eeek!" She threw out her arms as the fingers behind her curled shut for a reproachful squeeze.

*Yes you are, and we both know that you naughty little thing. And there's the converse: sometimes you have the sharpest insights, but you also have a delightful knack for missing what's right in front of you. I meant it of course at a more – how might you call it? – universal level. Set against the limits of all spaces and times, amidst all that is encompassed by the four corners and the centre: what does it mean, to be a Dari?*

And Dari grimaced beneath those fingers, because just as she thought she and her acquirer had felt their way to a common wavelength of communication, she was suddenly a helpless hamster scurrying up an endless staircase again. She felt those fingers wrap her into a fist, albeit gently this time, with her head and shoulders exposed. It brought her in, tilted away so she lay wincing up at this tower of stupefying charisma.

"What do you mean, what does it mean to be a me?" she squeaked.

*Mhm, I think you know what I mean. You've just never thought about it on quite those terms. Still, I would hear your contemplations.*

*"W-Why? You seem to know so much about me already..."*

*Ohh, on the contrary, it is precisely to explore the full extent of this question that I have taken you into my hospitality this lovely evening. I ask you, Dari, because it affects another question which you might identify more of a stake in.*

*"Um, what's that..."*

*Goddess or not, she licked her lips.*

*What should I do with you?*

The tiny traveller, who was indeed much concerned with the answer to this question, held her breath.

## 食

Dari's unease was growing by the minute. Her captresses didn't usually exhibit such – well, conversationalism.

*I have been following your progress through the last thirty worlds, awaiting the prime opportunity to intercept you. But you naughty thing, you so rarely present an opening where I would not run the inconvenience of alerting others, what with the time you spend either in the attentions of your friends, or otherwise getting yourself secured out of reach upon, or within, the bodies of women.*

Dari's gigantic host loosened her fingers a touch, giving inquisitive rubs and squeezes to the little explorer's arms and legs as they slid into the gaps. But Dari was too taken aback to notice, and from somewhere in the irritable part of her brain she found the courage to answer back: "Y-You say that like I do it on purpose! You know it's not like that!"

*Mm. Is that so?*

Lifted to those lips, Dari flinched as they cast a gust of wind upon her. Ominously, it had turned warm and fragrant.

*"Well – urgh – of course it isn't! Didn't you say you've been watching me?"*

*Of course. I saw every wiggle.*

Her blush flushed fiercer, but here was a chance for the evidence-based historian in Dari to stand her admittedly cornered ground.

*"Then – gah – you saw what that scary emperor girl did to me, the one with the white hair and big red armour, oh, it must have been two weeks ago now? And in the middle of a battle too! Or how about that huge and terrifying burly woman whose lap I landed in when I finally found a rift out of there – from Sparta or something, she said she was – ack, all I remember is her thighs!"* A ghostly ache throbbled through her ribs at the mere remembrance. "Did any of that, any moment of it, honestly look like something I had the tiniest bit of control over? I mean, it's n-not as if I've come jumping into your hands here either!"

*But, didn't you, in some sense?*

"You know I didn't! I try to mind my own business but you all just seem to grab me whenever you like! I don't know why, maybe nobody really knows why, and I've stopped wondering because I've realised it doesn't do any good. All I know is that it goes on and on and on!"

Mm.

As the giantess appeared to ruminate on her protests, Dari felt a huff building in her chest at the thought that her latest captress might seriously be about to come up with some sophistry to make the case that she was gleefully diving down maws and spelunking into every living aperture in sight, perhaps on some lecherous dimension-hopping caving expedition.

*But isn't there more to it than that? If you'll permit me, little Dari, I would like to prise open this door for a smidge of further exploration.*

Oh god, thought Dari. I was right.

The prodigious entity swerved on the heels of her boots and swivelled Dari round, once more allowing her a view of the diorama where she last had contact with the ground.

*Can you tell me, sincerely and in all conviction, that at least a part of a woman of your experience did not know by now, from the moment you read my message, that resting in a place you thought would make you safe from collection was bound, in some inscrutable cosmic sense, to get you collected?*

I don't think I can take much more of this, Dari told herself.

She looked to see those glossy eyebrows, a great pair of sabres of dark moonlight, screwed up in concentration. *Your point is fair however. There are no coincidences, and the things that have befallen you on your journey, writ large, assemble into too consistent a structure to attribute to chance. You, little Dari, appear caught up in a system.*

"Well...I guess that's one way to put it..."

*A system in which you have found such a snug fit that it must have emerged precisely in order to accommodate you. As soon as your body began to develop a capacity for erotic sensations, this system had begun to draw you into its embrace, correct?"*

"As soon as I - n-no, wait a minute, that's ridiculous!" The tiny woman flushed with indignity. "All this only started when that maniac who I didn't even know came into my college dorm and pointed her stupid shrink ray at me! And then she swallowed me alive, which was horrible, and then I woke up and found I'd somehow been brought back, and she'd gone, and there was this strange rift in the air, and then -"

Mm. *So you are of the impression that everything changed with the one seminal incident.*

“Seminal – no, I’m not ‘of the impression’ that it changed everything, I know it did! Oohh, what are you trying to suggest?” She caught her balance in the maybe-a-goddess’s palm and started waving her arms in exasperation. “Of course it started with the incident! Don’t you know what it was like, living in that city? I’d barely even got to touch another woman before then because people were all so up themselves about who should be attracted to who or how relationships should work, so how can you suppose that anything in my life was alike before and after?”

*Oh my sweet little friend, I haven’t suggested anything yet! But I would like to know, for instance, where you got this.*

“Got what? That’s – hey!”

Her inquisitor had raised her other hand, a great pink megalith surging from the depths. Balanced on the tip of the little finger was an object, glinting a tiny golden glint as it caught the fading sunlight, and at the sight of it, Dari instinctively looked down. She had no idea how she had failed to notice she was barefoot.

“That’s my ankle ring! H-How did you – where are my shoes? Give them back!”

*All in good time, my cutie. What a delightful little trinket you wear!*

The giantess examined it from a couple of angles, sniffed it, then – to Dari’s consternation and galloping alarm – gave it a prod with the tip of her tongue.

“D-Don’t do that!”

*I’m sure you know this, but it carries chemical traces from hundreds of those friends you’ve made; from their most intimate regions at that! Mmm. Such energy! Such chemical passion, such force of will! This piece has been on quite the voyage, riding the heights of excitement across a myriad worlds. Oh, what joyous strength radiates forth!*

“I-It’s just a souvenir! From that, that street market, in...in Hanoi...”

As the memory trickled back she wondered if this obviously well-informed being knew where that was, and truth be told was a little surprised to remember it herself. Like most of her recollections from her old life, that trip had been stowed away on a high shelf and not taken down since the incident.

*Maybe so, but there is often more meaning in the journey than the point of origin. That said: an interesting point of origin, no?*

And Dari wondered: why this, now, of all things? It was so long ago, what’s it got to do with...?

*I see. Just as now, you were always curious to venture into the realms beyond and learn new things. You loved to hear the stories; especially because you felt you couldn’t trust the people around you to tell them fairly. Was that how it went?*

Dari remembered. Her imagination drifted out of her captor’s hand to return, for the first time in an age, to a land of rivers and mountains on the far side of her world, as experienced on one of the trips her family’s reasonable means had allowed her to partake in. But rather than delve through those bustling alleyways for the place she had got her anklet, some irresistible psychological gravity drew



her to a mountain temple where a cheerful old monk had regaled her with stories from the local folklore. There she had been struck with horrified fascination by one tale in particular, about a voracious nocturnal spirit called a *ma lai* – better known, the enthusiastic monk had told her, by the name the Thais gave it, the *krasue*. It consisted of the head of a beautiful women attached to a set of internal organs exposed to the air, most prominent among them a digestive tract with thick and lengthy intestines.

“Aahh!” Dari squealed as it all flew back to her, buried so long beneath memories which had bodily superseded it. That night in the village, and for several nights after, she had tossed and turned beneath her mosquito net, lost in nightmares about getting gobbled out of her bed in the lips of a gigantic *ma lai* and carried off into the night trapped inside it, churning in its stomach and squeezed through its entrails in a sequence that never seemed to end. And the worst thing was that its guts were transparent, so she could spot the people down in those communities gasping, and pointing, and – she swore this was true – no small number with faces lit by some inexplicable longing, as though if it ever let her go, she would stagger away past a queue of them waiting in hope of the same ride.

An otherworldly giggle snapped her back to the present, and she fell back in her captress’s soft pink palm with a shudder.

*You had forgotten. Understandable in the circumstances. Yet of consequence for our little exploration, no?*

“I d-don’t understand!” Dari protested. “How did you know about that?”

*You wanted to share it with me.* Rather than elaborate, the giantess then caused Dari a jolt of hot dismay as she tossed the tiny anklet into her cleavage.

*Don’t worry. You’ll get it back later. But now, why don’t we consider...ooh, there’s a tasty one. How about...yes. That last paper you submitted in your history class, just three days before your – mhm – call to adventure?*

“Three days...before...”

This one hit her all at once. She had spent the preceding weeks slumped in despondence, slandered unkindly by fellow students and threatened with insinuating menace by her professor, who made no secret of his resentment for Dari’s curiosity to learn about the histories of peoples he insisted didn’t matter. Feeling depressed and more than a little unwanted, she had wandered the woods a bit, returned to her dormitory with too many packets of crisps then mooched in front of her computer late into the night, for some reason ending up playing around with her own name in a search engine. This had brought her rambling into stories that in a stroke of insight soon became the basis for a marvellous assortment of historical randomness which, in an act of revenge on her instructor, she chose as her basis for that week’s coursework.

As the invisible edge of her giant memory-guide’s fingernail propped up her recollection, it flowed back into her word for word:

*'The Scots' sole attempt to become an independent colonial power took place with the **Darien scheme** in the late 1690s. In hopes of building a colony of their own in the Americas, this poorly-planned and ill-informed venture instead fed some three thousand of their settlers along with investments totalling a fifth of Scotland's national wealth into the scorching gullet of the Darien Gap (or properly in Spanish, Tapón del Darién, the '**Darien Plug**') in Panama...there to be digested and absorbed by malaria, dysentery and yellow fever under the churning pressure of an international trade blockade. This blow to Scottish wealth and prestige led directly to their submissive posture to the English in the formation of the United Kingdom the following decade – a unit which, three hundred years of peristalsis later, following the bilious action of the Brexit referendum on the Scottish independence movement, could be said to approach the rectal end of its journey.'*

From somewhere much closer echoed a voice: Hm hm hmm. I rest my case.

"No – no way..."

The conquering juggernaut smiled down at her casualty who lay cupped in her hand, blushing like an incandescent tomato, prostrate in defeat and at a total loss for words.

*You did write that, didn't you? Some might have called it brave.*

"I just thought...w-was just trying to be...creative..."

*Creative. You are not mistaken there.*

"Oh my god..."

*At your service.*

"That isn't funny!" Dari snapped, clambering onto hands and knees. "I can't believe any of this! How are you doing this to me? Why? I-I've never felt so naked in my life!" And it was worthy of note that she had barely begun to lose her clothes yet.

*But you see my point now, no? We appear to be finding something of an image schema.*

"What...what's that?"

*A pattern, if you will.*

"A p-pattern...no, I don't understand! I don't know how you're making me remember all these things! I haven't thought about them for ages, some of them I didn't even realise at the time were –"

*Of course you didn't. That's okay, my little one. I often have to remind my sisters – and here Dari shuddered again: there's more than one of you? – that many sapient creatures, even the most intelligent of all, lack the full executive control of their consciousnesses that our kind have attained, rather being driven in most of their actions by thoughts and feelings they are not even aware that they have.*

The hint of suggestion in there slapped Dari back to her senses. "But that doesn't mean I had any idea what was going to happen to me, and it definitely doesn't mean I'm somehow responsible for – for – mmph..."

Dari was learning this goddess-thing had a habit of closing her up for a squeeze when she got too worked up. In the instant before succumbing to the rush of helplessness she began to seethe, so incensed she even considered bringing her teeth down on one of these mesmerising fingers, but all that steam fizzled away in that smothering, sensuous bath in tiny hamster instincts that they proceeded to administer to her. Panting and gasping as she emerged from this one, she had to admit it was irritatingly effective.

“Ack...wh-where...but where are we going with this? Why does it even matter?”

*Well for what it's worth, I like what you wrote. I like little ones like you who aren't afraid to give voice to their truths, or better yet, to give voice to them even when afraid. Especially when incorrectly told they shouldn't.*

Dari felt like the flow of time had dropped her on the floor just there, leaving her scrambling to catch up. Now this inconceivable cosmic being was bestowing unto her the divine judgement, ‘for what it was worth’, that she liked her student essays. Back in the day she might have delighted in slamming what was surely this ultimate take-that into a certain ‘blinkered, condescending, neo-colonial’ face; but there were realities and realities, and for Dari not all of those were real anymore.

“I – look,” Dari sighed at last. “All that was another life. It's gone now, and I'm not used to thinking about it because it doesn't exactly help me with my new one. I'm not the person I was back then anymore.”

*Are you? Or are you not? Mm. Is it correct to frame this as a choice between one alternative or another?*

“Why wouldn't it be? Everything – I mean, *everything* – changed that night.”

*Take the incident itself, then. The terror you went through that evening, if your first in what we might call the gastric variety, was far from the first misery that you had known on your homeworld's account. The culprit too, as far as I can discern, was entirely a product of that world. However the experience in its own right chimes in far finer consonance with the rhythm of your journey since leaving it. So I ask you: was your first voyage into a woman's body part of the old life? Or the new?*

The spirit of complaint welled up into Dari's mouth – then faltered. This unfathomable colossus had picked her up like so many others had, but rather than consume her body she had come pushing into her mind, and now Dari was watching powerless as the uninvited guest licked and tasted and slurped up a delicatessen's worth of her foundational assumptions about her life. Of course she felt insecure at these probings, she realised. The resolve to put her past behind her had carried the load of all her efforts to make as good a go as she could of what had been thrust upon her – to turn it into a meaningful future – and had got her impressively far in that endeavour, all things considered. That long clamber, from resignation to the status of walking snack to the present more promising paradigm of dimension-trotting fulfilment with a network of loving friends, had

not been trivial. But Dari's captress had dug up long-buried gremlins whose significance had never properly occurred to her, then strung up wires for them to rappel down chuckling into her present, and was now at last easing down a great big finger to finish off that temporal border fence in smithereens.

*They all think you ran away, you know.*

Dari jerked as though the words had struck through her heart.

*And they're not entirely wrong, are they?*

She forced herself to her feet. "Look...just why –"

*Had you really belonged there, had you really felt loved and cared for, would it not have lingered in your mind to seek somebody's attention? To climb something, maybe, or write a message; to signal for help? Yet from the moment you approached that shimmering rupture between the realms and looked through to the other side – you never hesitated, did you?*

"I..."

*The marvels and mysteries you saw through there: you had no idea what you would find. It could have been anything. Absolutely anything. Universes are not small. Was that not a worry for you, made tiny or not? Was it really 'anywhere but here'?*

A gale of memories and emotions whirled through her mind's eye, causing Dari to almost lose her balance; but she gritted her teeth and shunted them aside.

"Please. I'm really don't want to go this way anymore. Please. I don't...I don't know how to deal with this. Never mind that I still don't have a clue who you are or understand how you just...read me inside out like this; it's just that if this goes on, I feel scared that everything I've built since that awful day might..."

She wavered, but her inquirer waited patiently for her to finish. She was struggling with herself over something; some arduous internal tussle.

"How about this," Dari said at last. "You could just...um..." She trudged off to battle in the rear again, then returned, a dejected pyrrhic victor. She sighed: "You could just eat me. If that's what you want. I'd prefer that to all this digging into my soul. Or you could...you can...nn...use me...however you want...which I know you could anyway, but..."

*You're blushing you know. Later I shall bring you to a mirror and show you just how cute you are when you go all flustered. All the...mhm...things, the places you've been through, and it still so pleasantly discomfits you to put them into words...*

"H-Hey, I'm serious! I don't want to feel all ransacked anymore! Anything you do to my body will heal, because of my core, but if you keep on rummaging through my memories, then, then..."

Ah, yes. *Your core.*

She was grateful for the change of subject. "Uh...yes. My core. What about it?"

Oh, little Dari. Dari, Dari, Dari.

And now the fingers of that giant hand curled round, snatched her up securely in their tips, then unfurled to full length to bring her right in front of that sphinx-like face.

“A-a-ack...”

*Be soothed. I have no interest in pulling the books off the shelves of your psyche till they all fall down. Quite the contrary, in fact. I've been wondering when you'd realise the real reasons I reached for you, other than that you're simply adorable and need picking up, of course. Yet you surprise me. For all your perceptiveness and flair for making out asterisms, here we are, stumbling upon the pertinent concerns by the mere drift of our conversation. Have you still to work it out?*

Dari's anxiety at having the carpet swept from beneath her life was displaced, comprehensively, by that of being dwarfed beneath a gigantic face so close that she could make out every detail and probably fit in most of them too. The indigo fires that drilled from those retinas blazing, the resolute curls of those eyelashes, the creases in those lips whose every pronouncement was a bulldozer; the shifting magenta lakes that slept in the depths of those oceanic pink cheeks. She saw nothing in that face of the hungering thrill or naked lechery that so often took over the expressions of women who got their hands on her; if anything there was a security to this being's stern beauty that told her this was an individual for whom every action, every unstoppable motion took place exactly as she intended it. Hunger was there, and so too lust, but it was hunger and lust for so much more than her body. To tremble at faces that simply communicated to her she was about to be put inside and that was that: that fear was Dari's constant companion, by now might even be called her friend. This, right now? This was Biblical fear.

*Dari, the power spoke again, and it was immediately clear that Biblical might not be a big enough term. Has it yet to occur to you that the most supreme of ironies governs your life? You delve from world to world, getting thrown into stomachs left, right and centre. Yet you, you almost alone among all life born of your world and a great deal beyond it, have travelled out of range of the digestive splashes of the greatest stomach of all. The supreme predator, that which must devour all people in all realities at least once, has lost all interest in devouring you.*

Recoiling at the imagery, Dari did her best not to scream.

*Isn't it clear, little Dari? Time. I speak of Time.*

“Eep...t-time?”

*Time. It has elected not to touch you. It dares not even lick you, aside from surreptitious snatches of flavour when it catches you looking elsewhere. It nibbles on some people and chomps on others, its jaws drawing each out along such a plane as is required to give them a story; but not you. Your story, if it continues in its present condition, will never have an end. Mmm. Does Time fear you, I wonder? Does it await something of you? Or does it mean to keep you suspended in an*

*equilibrium, some endless loop that spins you on till you've had the chance to sail through every woman in every universe?*

This last suggestion struck the sturdiest blow to Dari's wits so far, and she yelped, "Aaaahh! No! P-Please, that's too much...it can't be! It c-couldn't possibly...Nnnnn!"

*I jest, little one. Perhaps.*

"Ahh, don't! I don't know what I'd do if – what do you mean, perhaps?!"

*'Perhaps', because reality doesn't do certainties, as you well know. But there is a genuine puzzle in how you have become tethered to a mooring in Time, all damage you sustain restored, almost all senescence forestalled; and the answer to that puzzle, I believe, lies right – in – there – a series of focused pokes on the breasts – in that convoluted little box of mysteries you call your 'core'.*

The fingers grappled Dari into a fist again, pinning her arms to their sides but lifting her higher to meet that impossible gaze on an equal plane.

*I am soliciting your consent, little Dari, to let me crack open that box and feel about inside. Shh, don't struggle. I meant it figuratively, of course. I don't propose to do the slightest injury to you or to it, nor shall I take it away without good reason. You came upon these powers in good faith, and so long as you remain responsible in your use of them I shall respect that. Yet I have my own responsibility to fulfil in obtaining satisfaction that that will be the case, and I expect you to understand this much: that yours are not routine capabilities, nor even merely special ones. To sense and slip through the cordons between realities; to return nigh indestructible from any and all misfortunes: feats like these are exceedingly rare, little Dari. They are the preserve of the most powerful beings in all existence, among whom I must modestly but objectively count yours truly, and to a budding chronicler like you I should not need to point out why.*

"I – I never thought about it that way...I just..."

*I know, and that is what puts me at ease. You are simply not the kind of individual to whom it occurs to pursue the temptations such facilities might encourage in the wrong hands. Your honesty, your kindness and your cuteness have seen to that. However: you have put your very mortality in the deep-freeze, Dari, and all realities, all dimensions, are potentially in reach of your designs. Don't you realise what that means?*

Now Dari really began to tremble. This was yet another class of fear, and this one she had never had cause to suffer.

*Let us say you decided to reduce to ruins a civilisation whose cuisine offended you. You might have returned to grind down its defenders, its dwellings, its great works day by day, piece by piece, till nothing remained but powder in the desert. Or, you could have taken it upon yourself to murder some deity whose face you disliked, journeying back across the stars to chip away at his cells for however many millennia, no matter how many millions of times you were blasted to dust and your*

core flung to the furthest reaches, till at last you drove your toothpick into his shattered forehead to the terror of all who cowered in the shockwaves of his fall. But you have done nothing of the sort – so far. The potential paths to Godbreaker Dari, or Dari the Tyrant, or Dari, Destroyer of Worlds have not for one instance coalesced in your vision, and the intensity of your shaking tells me that you would prefer them gone from it again with every efficiency. But Time may change people, you know this well, and its chops are sometimes cruel, and when it finds a way to get them around you again, and pulls, which eventually it must, who knows what the name of Dari might mean by then? If the Dari of today is, as you insist, a different person from the Dari of yesterday, then what possibly can we know of the Dari of tomorrow?

“Nnnnnnnn...”

Deep in this winter of petrifying solemnity, the crack of a smile broke through that giant face, a ray of warmth to rescue Dari from the stranding cold.

Suddenly Dari the snack doesn't sound quite so bad anymore. Wouldn't you say?

“Nnnnnnnn...”

Well, then, I shall interpret that as a yes. I accept your permission to further investigate you. I shall determine the origin of these anomalous faculties of yours as well as their nine million likeliest implications, and when I have obtained the understanding I require, I shall decide what to do.

“Ahh....ahh...”

Shhh. I shall not hurt you. Observing you has given me no reason to suspect a significant propensity for corruption on your part, and if I happen to find it, then I have plenty of soft, warm options to offer you to shore up your insulation.

“S-Soft...warm...nnnnnn...”

Yes. But Dari. As thanks for your confidence in me, let me share something that will put you at ease. My sisters and I lack digestive organs. We dispensed long ago with the need for material sustenance, and in the forms we have achieved prefer to nourish ourselves on energies such as the trust, love and joy – among other passions, eheh – that we draw from cute little ones like you. Our – mhm – prey is not harmed, but enriched, by our feeding.

Something chinked deep within Dari's blue-screen paralysis. Of all the voices in the chorus of her self, the one that piped up now was the most reliably mistaken. At the slightest excuse for activation, its habit was to wrestle past her better judgement to slip in her ear a phrase whose very emergence, with mortifying inevitability, brought about its own disproof.

It was the voice that insisted: “Perhaps it will be different this time...”

On this occasion, as all other voices in the assembly were cowering beneath their seats and mumbling incoherent terrors, “perhaps it will be different” rebooted Dari in its inauspicious confidence. She realised she was heeding it, flailed within herself to push it back in its seat. She knew this voice must under no circumstances be entertained. But then she slipped on the slick of oil that was the

thought: hold on, let's look at this with a level head. This divine succubus or whatever she is just wants to find out more about me. She terrifies me – I mean, look at her – but she's been more or less gentle in my handling, and clear in her intentions, and seems to want to get me comfortable in where I stand with her. It can't be easy to express stuff at her level in ways that tiny people like me can understand, but I get that she has a point about my core and the rifts and stuff. Maybe she can even help me understand them better myself. And though she's frighteningly assertive, perhaps more so than she realises, she keeps asking for things like my opinions and my consent. If she just wanted to eat me, or take away my core, which I'm sure she could, why would she have gone through all this fuss with me? Surely, surely, this time it will be different. I might even get to stay dry.

*And I suppose it would be unfair to proceed without your knowing in whom – eheh, sorry, in whose work you will be participating.* The prodigious individual had fallen back to her more casual tone from before that bloodcurdling stuff about Dari the annihilator of the universe. A limber pink fingertip stroked her hair as she wondered if she should feel suspicious about that smile, which came across as far too light-hearted for a being of such magnitude.

*Call me Eclipse. That's what my friends call me.*

“E-Eclipse...”

For all her intimidation Dari flushed with a new kind of awe. This celestial castle of a woman, even as she fondled the miniaturised wanderer in purposeful fingers each longer than she was tall, seemed to be implying that she should address her as a friend. An equal.

*Now I trust you are well fed and rested and have no need for immediate reliefs. Rather, I know you are, because that's what the arrangement with the biscuits was for. And because I have suspicions about your diet, which, you should know, is ironic, I took the trouble to have them infused with a healthy balance of nutrients. That should sustain you plenty.*

“Um...what exactly are you going to do to, uh, investigate me?”

Now that she thought about it, as much as her most familiar ordeals appeared to have been removed from the table, she equally hoped she wasn't about to get her memories put through more combine harvester battalions or be tangled up in unnavigable philosophical webbing.

Eclipse narrowed her eyes, regarding her thoughtfully. Dari almost thought she could hear mighty cogs grinding beneath those handsome horns, and not receiving an immediate reply, she dared to cast her eyes up and down this behemoth again, hurriedly leaping over her central high wilderness. That azure cloak was mesmerising, she decided to think instead, as she caught the flick of a tail in the shade behind it.

*Mm. There's nothing else for it.*

“Huh?”



*Ultimate-class power in contention; pan-cosmic potential field of consequence; and adorable cutie whom in accordance with insistent universal forces, must – that's 'must' as in light 'must' shine – be secured in safe and warm hospitality. There's nothing for it but a complete triangulation.*

*“A – what? What do you mean, a triangulation?”*

*Dari felt the fingers tighten around her.*

*As you will have noticed, because noticing is what you do, my body possesses a great many senses adapted to soak information in over one hundred million formats out of love-capable beings like you. Proximity alone suffices to build a well-rounded picture. But I seek a much more comprehensive understanding of the girl in my hand and the extraordinary alterations she has received, so I can best achieve it by offering you a triangulation. Surely you are familiar with the basic concept, whose origins in simple geometric principles makes it indispensable to the surveyors of many worlds?*

*“I...I think so. Measuring angles and distances, using triangles; like, with those posts I keep finding on mountaintops? Yeah, I've seen that all over the place. But, what do you...in this case...triangles...”*

*She did not know why, but a sense of awkward helplessness was welling up in her chest. She was blushing again.*

*It's the same idea, only unfolded to assess a far greater multiplicity of qualities because you're such a complex little creature.*

*“Complex...?” Dari wasn't being modest, merely at pains to square Eclipse's suggestions of her importance with years of an accumulated psychology more commonly found in the drawers of confectionary stores.*

*I measure you at thorough length with one set of senses, and then another. From those I can extrapolate for everything I would get from the third, but you know, let's do the third too while I have you here, because then that provides me a finer picture of everything in the centre plus its place in the further network of triangles that maps out your cosmic context. Have you understood? Good. Let us begin.*

*Dari gulped. Eclipse had lost her completely on the details, but those excited breaths, those leering eyes, that lusty grin at the end; something, everything, was screaming to her that she should brace herself.*

*Ooh, I've been so looking forward to working with you, my delightful little Dari-Dari. Would that you had come to my attention sooner. Oh, and one last thing: if your mind still labours in the shadows of those silly pretences to empiricism that have overrun the pursuit of truth in your world of origin, you might find my methodology somewhat...licentious. Worry not. My way is better.*

*“Triangu-aaahh!”*

*Eclipse tossed Dari into her mouth – Yes...mmm! Better in a multitude of ways! – and strode from the room.*

Eclipse – paragon among her kind, unwavering in her service to universal love, and eventually, in the depths of one of humanity’s worst timelines, to be whispered of in chilling notoriety as ‘Eclipse of the Earth’ – was absolutely thrilled with her new toy.

Some people, said toy among them, might have found trouble in such an identification in so far as it seemed to contradict the serious investigation that was Eclipse’s clearly stated aim, to say nothing of her respect for the bold little dimension-hopper. But this would have been to misunderstand the psychology of Eclipse and her sisters, to whom either-or dichotomies and silly concepts like the division of work and play were foreign.

Eclipse pinned Dari between her tongue and the roof of her mouth as she marched on. The tiny explorer, finding that this exercise was not proceeding according to her expectations, responded by hammering and elbowing the pulp of that titanic tongue whenever her arms found the purchase to.

*Hey, you’ve committed now. Finish what you start!*

Eclipse communicated with no need to move her mouth. It had after all found engagement in a more productive purpose: subjecting Dari to the dedicated attentions of its taste buds, which were attuned to relish not only the common flavours but thoughts, emotions, knowledge, instincts, memories, values, traumas, dreams, relationships and any of more than five million other flavours of information that together represented a person’s character, physical and chemical structure, life history and unique place in the cosmos.

A sharp squeak echoed from the cavern of Eclipse’s throat as she stretched a finger inside and rolled the tiny girl on her tongue. It satisfied Eclipse to distinguish her green top, her light black vest, her traveller’s skirt and wristbands – she could taste their colours, their materials, their weave, even stories of their manufacture unknown to Dari herself; as well as her fetching mop of brown hair and, best of all, the eruption of flavour afforded by the skin of her arms, legs, face and midriff.

But the other reason to do this – or on the record, the *real* reason – was to roll her up in a light coat of what the lay observer might have taken for saliva. It looked like saliva, felt like saliva and even bubbled like saliva, but it was marginally less viscous than saliva, lacked its digestive components which to Eclipse were superfluous, and most importantly, put Dari under the attentions of some microscopic globules of pure energy it carried that were Eclipse’s distant – that is, *extremely* distant – evolutionary homologues of white blood cells. Unlike their cousins, these had no intent to gulp their guest up as a threat (though some, were they large enough, might have liked to for different reasons), but rather got to work freshening and disinfecting every square micrometre of her surface with minuscule energy bursts. They did this because Eclipse was a generous host, but

also because it would guarantee her taste buds a survey free of distortions from extraneous matter.

Its other outcome was a wet Dari. She wriggled and glugged through the soggy onslaught, but after a time she stopped, and Eclipse beamed as she tasted why. Dari's wealth of field expertise had evidently informed her that this felt different from regular saliva. She was even suspecting, rightly, that it was better for her skin than any soak in the medicinal waters of a hot spring. Alas, all such benefits were outweighed in her mood by the humiliation of having such niche proficiencies dominate her proverbial skills tab.

By then Eclipse, heart brimming with anticipation, had pushed through the door to the room where she was usually found buried in her research, at least when she was not entertaining guests (to leave it at that) or soaring about on expeditions. This was not so usual among her sisters, who in the main could be thought of as practical types, and it was in part Eclipse's eccentric cerebralism and cast-iron thirst for hard understanding that so distinguished her repute. It would be meaningless to attempt a description of most of her study-den's contents, for whose shapes and functions written languages have no words. Some of the only things recognisable to an individual like Dari, who need we be reminded was not at present in a position to appreciate them, were an array of panels bobbing in the air like disembodied lavender-hued computer screens, as well as a bunch of more obviously physical displays plastered round the vibrating walls. A good portion of them, filling up at least a quarter of the room, bore images with disconcerting resemblances to the people and landscapes of Earth.

Eclipse reclined on some floating cushion arrangement she summoned out of the air with a click of her fingers, then steered it to a commanding position amidst the panels.

*Well then. Let's have a general sampling first.*

By *general sampling* she of course invoked a rigorous and systematic procedure: namely, tonguing Dari all the way round in her mouth to enjoy whatever flavours randomly emerged. She began to manipulate the wiggling young lady into the nooks and crannies of her oral cavern, from the insides of her cheeks to the soft carpet of her palate, in each place packing Dari in with her tongue then jiggling it in place. Each charming muffled squeal, each sensation of that little body that felt so perfectly shaped for pressing against those pressure points, sent lightning bolts of excitement coursing through Eclipse's mass.

*Mmm...MMMM! I fast understand why this has such cross-dimensional appeal. What an honest taste! Why don't you make yourself comfortable, my little sweet? We have so much to share with each other, and I'm sure you have plenty of time on your hands tonight. Oh, I definitely do.*

Her pleasure was a very important part of it, and not only because it is a worthy thing for love-capable life to enjoy its labours. The enjoyment was empirically significant in and of itself. Attuned to cosmic levels of perception, Eclipse knew

she was not merely feeling thrilled as an individual, but partaking in what by now could accurately be called a broad and inclusive cross-cultural tradition.

A system. Somehow, a universal – and thus inescapable – constant had emerged in the fundamental rulebook of reality. It drifted right down there in the deepest currents where were found such bedfellows as gravity, electromagnetism, the nuclear forces and, naturally, love itself, and what it required was that women of certain positions and temperaments find Dari so adorable, so physically and metaphysically appetising, as to be driven to tuck her away as deep in the snug, warm safety of their bodies as she could go; even so far as that ultimate, most secure embrace of integrating her matter into their own.

A tiny concentration of pressure signalled that she had sumo-wrestled her way on top of Eclipse's tongue and was trying to steady herself by hugging it. Eclipse exhaled in dignified bliss and committed to indulge deeper in that joy, all for the laudable defence of the interests of all universes of course, by swinging her tongue around in great circles, bouncing its passenger along on more of a ride than she bargained for till she lost her grip and tumbled into the web of membranes beneath. Gently Eclipse lowered her tongue to resting position, catching Dari's desperate attempts to scramble out then pressing her away in that wet lagoon of connective tissues.

*What must it be like for you, you sweet little thing, to live amidst the pressures of this new force? Eclipse wondered, keeping her ponderings from Dari to allow the girl a purer experience of the ride. Hah, even I – I! – feel this intuition, that it is right that I encase her in my carnal power, and that I take joy in having her feel with all her being exactly how encased she is. And she feels it, oohh, how she feels it; has felt it so much she's lost count of how many times it has happened, feeling it blend in her memories into a singular storm which keeps whisking her back in, constant, neverending, tossing and washing her in a kaleidoscope of scents and splashes in the darkness of one great hot and fleshy underworld. Mmm!*

Feeling a pair of tiny wet palms press beneath her tongue, she lifted it, just long enough to let its captive think she was getting out of this one; then allowed it to sink naturally back into place, all by itself, entombing the reluctant frenulum-bather in its folds.

*Shh, settle a while. I need to think!*

"Nnnnnfff...!" came a tiny protest, only to be engulfed in a slosh! as the glands beneath had their fun.

Eclipse rested her chin in her hand, absent-mindedly thumbing into the hollow beneath. *Hmm. Most mortals would be driven from their senses. This seems not a fair burden, even for the great many of them – more than are prepared to admit it, in the case of Dari's world of origin (and here she glanced at her information wall) – who carry a sensual excitement at some or all of the things she's been put through. The apparent disempowerment, the narrative contraction, the sheer relentless*

*absurdity; that's more than their wits could take even before we factor the physical elements into the equation. Yet this little one: this is not the taste of a victim. Her powers have turned the burden into a bargain, a balance of paradoxes: disempowered, yet with powers most of her kind only dream of; a story reduced, yet flung out across a thousand glittering canvases; absurd, but as absurd in adventure as in misadventure.*

Hmm. Dari's Bargain. It does have a certain ring to it. So she takes it, and so it takes her, till it becomes a tautology. If she couldn't take it, she would no longer wander around to be taken; but because it is she who takes it, it is she, not someone else, I have as my guest this night.

She raised her tongue, higher this time, and put in her thumb and forefinger to draw Dari from her squelching immersion. These reflections had impelled Eclipse to cut her some slack, so she suspended her there for a minute or two, thumb on chest, fingertip on back, feeling her slippery body heave and tremble as she got back her breath; but no sooner had she started to wriggle again, Eclipse slammed her lips shut and withdrew her hand. Feeling Dari land with a bump on her tongue, she raised it up and began agitating the walls of her mouth on all sides. It was time for some serious savouring.

"Mmff-eeee-mffhh! Nnclpss! Lfft mn nnnt!"

Mmm...MMM! Ohh, so sweet! Unbelievable...such lovely sweet, sweet sugar, with some satisfying savoury notes for balance. Mmm...and that - there! - oohh. A tiny tinge of spice. Mmm. I like that.

She did; because as dubious as it might sound, these were substantial observations. Properly interpreted, they were Eclipse's objective discovery that for all that blushing and wiggling and squeaking that made up the bulk strata of Dari's psychic geology, right at the bottom could be found a bedrock of patience and equanimity that was actually quite difficult to break. And when it cracked, as it had on only a handful of occasions since Dari's incident, well, that was what released the spice. It was this that Eclipse found so scrumptious: that when pushed too far, even by women high in libidinous throes at twenty or thirty times her size, this little doll was capable of retaliating with a ruinous tabletop bollocking that could condemn even the blithest predator to a restless night buried in a pit of shame, thunder ringing in her ears and her conscience crumpled in guilt.

Ever with an eye to her ethics, Eclipse decided to sample just one more grain of this hazard-spice before patting it safely away. When it had burst forth, she noted, it was because Dari felt wounded at a level her core was no help with. That is to say, when someone had broken her trust; and moreover the upset had to be so egregious as to overcome her customary tendency to point the finger at herself. It did not surprise an observer of Eclipse's experience that the unfortunate bitten biters, so to speak, had typically not been ravenous strangers but some of Dari's

closest friends. And her friends they remained: for forgiveness, once it broke free from those pressurised rocks, was fast to bob to the surface of her bashful seas.

Eclipse reflected, tucking the girl into her cheek meanwhile for some scrupulous licking.

*You are so much more than you seem, little Dari. Just as our tiniest of friends, the singularities, emit the universes' fiercest roars, I am in no doubt you could have scared off most any of your capturers had you brought to bear the vigour of your feelings. Even I might have hesitated in that case, and I shall commit to never causing you such dismay as to let you feel I deserve your wrath. But you are not Dari the Tyrant. Is it because the belief that reality is woven of beautiful threads, the desire to let everyone have their chance, comes so naturally to you? Is the path of least resistance really to remain the sincere little bonsai who sways with the wind, not bending rigid against our passion but squeaking and blushing deeper into its folds? Is it your fear that defending your agency by gnashing against your captresses, or even against the cosmic twist that sends them in pursuit of you, might in wounding their hearts cost you something still more vital to the person you are?*

Her tongue picked up Dari round the waist, flung her gently into the other cheek and began repeating its treatment in symmetry. *Oh my sweet little sugar cube. It's not your size and sweetness that make you the supreme prize. All that richest, most luscious taste is found in the largest part of you: your adorable heart.*

## 食

Eclipse enjoyed a good hour of these general explorations. Then, leaving Dari to a momentary respite on her resting tongue, she set her sights on her primary concern.

*Two irregular little naughtinesses: her lesser rift-sensing ability and her regenerative core. So then.*

*The first, while remarkably rare in creatures like her, does not perturb me. It remains rudimentary: a knack, not yet a skill, allowing her to detect and pass through the simplest grade of rifts. She is a long way yet from unlocking the more complex crossings or opening new ones at will. Her use of this gift has been exemplary: it brings the joys of all the realities to her, and the joys of her to all the realities. Such freedom of movement belongs nowhere better than in the hands of cute little adventurers like her; although, I would still like to know how she got it...*

*A dreamy smile crept across her lips, unbeknownst to the individual concealed within them.*

*Oh Dari, you overflow with paradoxical flavours. This freedom of movement's another one. You revel in it, for your access to the rifts has formed the basis for all your new life's excitements. And yet, it seems funny to speak of freedom of movement*

*in a girl who spends half her time enclosed in organs or packed immobile in voluptuous soft tissue.*

Had this remark been directed to her, Dari would have no doubt felt the heat in her cheeks. Instead she sprawled languid on Eclipse's tongue, its gentle rocking tossing her mind back to the great succubus's disquieting words about an eternal cycle trapped in attentions like these. But Eclipse, not wishing her little friend to get too horrified, set about trampolining her upon her tongue, taking care to keep her horizontal as she prepared for the more difficult problem of the two.

*It is more a quandary that she is nigh-indestructible. At a personal level it delights me, as I am sure it has delighted countless of those to whom it passed her through what should otherwise have been terminal experiences. But the cosmos at large must also have its say. Why has it contrived for her to end up with this 'core', when it also has the most to lose if it falls into the habit of handing out such things like bags of stardust? It is not simply that in the hands of unscrupulous individuals such a 'core' could break universes. Give it to a mortal who does not want it, and its burden is the cruellest imaginable. Give it to a handful of people of any inclination, and you create a power differential so extreme that few societies could stand its stress. Give it to everybody, and their stories lose satisfaction for want of completion, whilst holding down the covers of those whose have yet to begin. Deny it meanwhile to those with ill designs, and there is no violence they will not commit to seize it for themselves.*

The bouncing of her tongue intensified, producing squeaks.

*Mm. This power does not arise spontaneously. Imagine if it did; imagine the ecological and narrative instability it could detonate across the worlds. It is extraordinary for good reason. Indeed, to the best of my understanding, only three hundred and thirty individuals have been reported with it from across the realities in my primary sphere of concern, of which two hundred and forty-seven I found to be metaphorical at best, seventy-six were flawed or partial in their processes, and of the remaining seven, three live here as my sisters' long-term companions. In the world little Dari comes from I know of only one example for sure, and not a human but that bloody monkey.*

She reminisced a while about that monkey, whom she had had to punish with five hundred years in her cleavage after he attempted to seize absolute power in his reality and then, worse, had the temerity to piss in her hand. She still had second thoughts about letting them change it in their stories to their Buddha putting him under a mountain, but those were tempestuous times, she admitted with a sigh, and their sensitivity couldn't be helped.

*Right. Well, this little one is ambivalent about her life's storm of flesh and fluids, but it is surely exactly that time she spends in bodies driven by sincere desires that has sequestered her from a far unhappier storm, a storm with no redeeming features which, so long as she carries this core, must one day break upon her. She walks, or more often rides, in good company among whom immortals, transcendentals,*

*divinities and other such high-level love-capable sapients are, if not common, then at least reasonably familiar. But when it comes time to involve herself in worlds whose tendencies are not so sincere...*

This was dangerous. Even supposing Dari's core made an honourable go of its powers for, let us say, fifty thousand years, each activation would further spread the knowledge that she had them. In time that knowledge would reach the wrong ears. That was inevitable in this age of nascent multiversalisation. The only alternative was to take those powers off her, an option which Eclipse categorically rejected. Not only would it have been horrendously mean, it would involve a coercive assertion of power, requiring a thought process whose menace is clear to anyone who exists in a manner creditable to their universe. Needless to say, a being of her magnitude sipping the poison of authoritarianism could unleash catastrophic peril.

*Well, let's acknowledge what must be acknowledged.* She brought the tongue-trampoline to a halt, feeling the impact of tiny hands and feet come down, then signalled with some ominous quaking of the tongue (which turned those four distinct pressure points into a linear one) that the real fun was about to begin. But while savouring the tiny girl's apprehension – she was casting startled looks in all directions – Eclipse had first to do due diligence to her initial conclusions.

She fingered the panels to bring up a tree of files on individuals of concern to her across the realities. Not just anyone got into this collection. The lower branches contained only a few billion people whose stories, she deemed, were or would be of primary cosmic consequence for the love-based network of realities she meant to consolidate. On the higher branches were those individuals she had taken a personal stake in. She placed her fingertip down on one of these branches and followed it out, past many worlds' worth of names of great explorers, historians, surveyors, storytellers, exiles, diminutive warriors and seekers of truth.

*Your journey has only begun, little Dari. You are part of something so much greater than you know. And for a girl like you, with a heart like yours, and power like yours, the path will be neither short nor straightforward.*

Her finger approached the end of the branch, where the clutches of names grew sparser. She hesitated, by routine – always review before a final decision – then nodded to herself, and went on. She was committed now. Right near the end, among spaces reserved for the most legendary cosmic wayfarers, those whose stories birthed mythic archetypes and were the stuff of epics that poets and bards spent days in the recounting, Eclipse prodded at the end of a branch. A new leaf sprouted, which she enlarged with two fingers, then entered some basic configurations. *Nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine pages: that should do for a start.* And then she placed an index finger in her mouth, gently tapped the restless little creature within by way of a participatory ritual, then with the same



fingertip, drew beside that leaf, in green letters in that individual's own native tongue of course: *Dari*.

*Hmm. Maybe I should get her a nice cloak like mine one day. In a smaller size, of course. Green seems to suit her.*

She smiled at her work, made to file it away; then whisked it back up. At the end of *Dari's* name she added a tiny green heart.

*Now then!* Eclipse veered back to the main nest of panels and this time sat up in concentrated attention. *Come here you.*

A tiny "eep!" escaped from between her lips.

*If I am to help you, she thought to herself, I am necessitated to discover the origins of your power.*

She began to swirl the girl around in her mouth again. *Let's see. As far as you have deduced, your core and sense for the rifts arose as radiation-induced chance genetic mutations, a side-effect of the procedure that shrank you. You were first alerted to this when you re-awoke after digestion by the culpable party – ooh, a nasty piece of work, to be sure – and through further trial and experience, went on to cognise your core, so coming to believe it had delivered you from what you are certain was a fatal sequence of events.*

*Oh. Really?*

She was puzzled already. How would a nuclear process that reduced her whole body equally, also transform one individual cell and the cells of her eyes, in such outstanding but radically different ways at that, while leaving the remainder of her with only these faintest traces of radioactive residue? Furthermore, if *Dari* had died and regenerated – that is to say, lost her consciousness when the responsible parts of her brain had shut down, then regained it on their successful reassembly – surely she would have no experience of sensory existence while reduced to that core, and therefore, no possible way of knowing about it.

*Unless...unless, of course, at least a critical portion of that consciousness remained functional. But that in turn would require her faculties for consciousness to have remained intact. In other words, could the core's action be not only to regenerate, but at least to that degree, to preserve?*

The fires of her eyes roared like stars far younger than she was (although your narrator would kindly request that you do not bring this choice of analogy to her attention).

*Mmm! Taste this. I think we're dealing with something much more interesting here.*

She licked her lips, much to her passenger's chagrin. One did not need Eclipse's acuity to tell that that wasn't a hapless squeaking anymore, it was an I-want-to-complain squeaking.

*Let's come at this from a different direction: hers. I'll just give the core itself a taste...right...there. Oof. Robust little thing. But no surprise: its vast majority of activations have occurred somewhere within a gastro-intestinal tract.*

*She grinned with anticipation.*

*Okay then my little suck-sweet. Run me through what getting gobbled up feels like for you.*

*Catching the focus of her interest upon her tongue, Eclipse now swathed her up in it completely. The high-pitched diatribe that had just been primed for launch was smothered on take-off into an "grmmmpfh!" as that flexible muscle closed Dari off to the world. However Eclipse made sure to leave just enough slack to slide and rub her against her taste-buds, an exploration accelerated by a vehement new outburst of wriggling.*

*Yum. She has the same complex nervous system as is typical of her kind; hence how fun it is to do this. She gave a squeeze. Not-so-fun consequence: her cellular breakdown by the action of digestive fluids would submit her to excruciating pain. Even allowing for full physical regeneration afterward, it would be liable to cause almost any healthy human to exhibit severe and persistent traumatic reactions after a single such experience, never mind the four hundred and twenty-two, by the minimal counting method, that stand tall – ehehe – in her record. And yet she exhibits no evidence of mental disturbance, not unless you count a pride capacity shrunk to the size of an atom with fluff on it. Far from it: witness her previously-noted equanimity, even – gosh – willingness to crawl into the stomachs of friends who have made her safety a guarantee, where confrontation with the same images and sensations would likely trigger debilitating distress in case of trauma. She rarely even cries – lick, lick – and when she does, it's more in moments of catharsis: joy or relief, rather than grief or fear. Only a handful of times have her tears flowed in a stomach, and only once in an intestine, with most instances bearing little first-degree relation to her situation at that time but rather to upsetting memories from prior to her shrinking: that is, subconscious reaction to certain foodstuffs associated with childhood stress, alongside which she was ingested.*

*A giggle, if a sympathetic one. Ah, that will also explain why she doesn't eat certain vegetables. What are her food preferences anyway? Well, they are what they eat and all that, so let's find out – lick, lick, slosh. Oh. Really? I would not say that tastes like a varied diet...*

*Pondering, Eclipse released her tongue-captive for a short reprieve. There was no wriggling this time; Dari had let herself fall upon her back on that wet and muscly surface, leaving her arms and legs stretched out as she caught her breath.*

*Her higher mind is adjusted to frequent, often sudden constriction. Her bodily instincts less so: witness her reflex to squirm, become agitated, and plead not to be variously installed in spite of long experience of the total futility of such a reaction. Nonetheless, signs of psychological damage commensurate with a repeated*

*experience of live digestion, or even the singularly distressing conditions of the first, are marginal to non-existent. Even – mhm! – an extremely faint but definite tinge of subconscious pleasure in sensations of massive tactile overpowerment under well-defined circumstances, especially in more evolutionarily ancient regions of her brain; a bashful secret of yours, you naughty, delicious little thing. These would of course include oral and oesophageal conditions, and this reaction, deep-seated to begin with, has only solidified with long-term exposure; especially since she made good friends who regularly administer it in circumstances more agreeable to her.*

Eclipse drank in the bliss of Dari's nourishing love for her friends, but her lips fell into a frown as she found herself fumbling with this scattered jigsaw-puzzle of facts.

*So then. Conclusion?*

Clearly there was more to this picture. But there were pieces missing, gaps she couldn't fill in herself.

*A pity I lack the physiology to test this in person, she thought. She imagined having a digestive system of her own with which to get to the bottom of the matter; then just as fast she yanked the reins on that train of thought. No, that proposition is beneath me, she chided herself. What was I thinking? I can't consider that! I am love incarnate!* And in the heat of her contemplations she spontaneously snapped her tongue round Dari again, this time rolling up its captive almost as tight as she could and giving her a sequence of mighty squeezes, producing frantic squeals.

*It would bring my ethics into question, wouldn't it?*

*"Glmmph! Mmmmph!"*

Keeping her tiny object of study locked in that strapping confinement, the prodigal researcher sat for some time as she pored over the displays.

*What I'm tasting right here on my tongue supports a simple proposition: the full course of Dari's digestive breakdown fails to complete, or more likely, is in some manner altered. But...actually, no, it's more complicated still. Because what of the records that speak the other way? Replacement with new cellular material after each restoration says nothing: species like hers live in a constant state of biomatter replenishment. But she has a clear physical memory of anxiety for breath in anaerobic gastric environments, as well as the sting of acid-induced burns and sores. Furthermore, if I lick the little one like this – mmm – then like this – ohh, that sweetness – I can deduce a net mass-energy transfer from her body to almost all of the individuals who have consumed her, sometimes substantial enough for visible changes to occur in the latter's biomass. And yet, tiny Dari consistently re-emerges with the exact same biomaterial structure and energy content as prior to her submersion.*

*Hmm. Eclipse coiled her rolled-up tongue back and forth. An exchange? And that on top of the clear continuities, most noticeably memory, whose short segments*

*between the onset of injury and loss of consciousness are never reversed even though the scorchies are. That's three distinct operations already...*

This was some conundrum. How to make sense of flesh that gave so regularly and generously to other flesh, yet offered no memory of discrete fragmentation: no bleeding, no tissue separation, no falling apart in messy segments? From where did its core derive the energy for either its protective or restorative functions if not from its immediate organic environments? Eclipse's curled-up tongue squeezed tight in search of answers; she could feel two little hands trying to slip between their coils to push them loose, like a tiny sailor trying to escape the affections of an amorous kraken.

Now consider something else: *this core undertakes a still more dramatic regenerative feat. Not organic matter, which is easy if you know how, but non-living synthetic textiles: namely, her cute little outfit. Even if her top, vest, skirt or shoes are completely dismantled, and note their diverse compositions, it reassembles them to pristine condition. And moreover – she felt around in her bust – her anklet. Indigestible. A painted alloy of high-grade titanium, mined from deep rich earth and strengthened by geomantic rituals rooted in an ancient and rigorous tradition. Ohh, I can feel their music...now that is haunting. Therefore it almost always separates from her core and makes its own progress down the tract, yet never fails to return to her on her reinstatement.* She reached the end of this train of thought just as a few flashes of insight, by way of background reflex, added four indigenous languages of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to the three billion or thereabouts that she could understand, though she twitched an annoyed eyelid as one further extrapolation brought her to French, which she had already collected.

*This finesse of this core: fantastic. How?*

She tightened her tongue once more, completely enclosing the tiny explorer in its hug. Right now, Eclipse savoured, Dari would be experiencing that thick rolled-up carpet of flesh as her entire world, and the stifled squeals from within only excited the great investigator to continue.

*Hang on; what is this? Her tongue contracted and loosened twice. Now then. Physical memory of acid-induced burns and sores, yes. But, burns and sores induced by enzymes, particularly stomach pepsin, whose pain would be beyond the sanely tolerable threshold once it broke through to her skin collagen: of that effect, virtually no sign. Of the action of intestinal lipases and amylases, less still. Ooh. How can this be? And – yes, taste this – when it comes to pain recollection in sum... Aha! It's as I thought! Squeaks and yelps, yes, but shrieks and wails, no. Her physical digestive experience, while still not exactly luxurious, ranks marginally compared to olfactory discomfort, primal dread, and most of all – ohh – humiliation?*

She unlocked her tongue and took a moment to focus her attention on the wriggling figure, who after all was not just some specimen, and who on falling free rolled right to the back of her throat.

*Aaww, you poor little mouse, she thought, catching Dari back then squashing her around suspended in that tongue with what Eclipse at least parsed as compassion. However upsetting you've found it to roll around gasping for breath as smelly ouchy substances lapped at your skin, that was nothing to the burns dealt to your self-esteem, was it not? How steadily it must have scorched out your ego from those first weeks on, as you stumbled in a daze from your old life, tumbling into one world's orifices after another's, and then all the more as it wore on and on and on with no signs of stopping. I see. At the lowest point, you came to feel that this was all you were good for now, the entire meaning of your life reduced to universal snack and all-purpose sex toy. By the stars, it's easy to forget how rough a ride it must have been. Here: let me give you a great big cuddle. The-e-ere you go...you don't mind my big huggable tongue, right? Hey, come on, don't stop wiggling yet!*

The monstrous organ lay Dari down along its central groove and tickled her body up and down with its tip, and feeling those satisfying little motions start up again, Eclipse set her focus back on her task. About as close to the right track as her tastebuds could get her now, she turned to another display and began sketching down whatever hypotheses came to mind in elegant, spiralling diagrams.

*Alterations to cutey's structure or composition, thus resistance to pain and/or altered sequence of digestive breakdown? If so, cause: original reduction event? Cross-world exposure? Extraneous factors involved?*

She chewed on her lip for a while, then gave a dissatisfied grunt and swept her hand across what she had just written, erasing all but the first six words. Moving from panel to panel, she continued: *Core seals host within (= dimensional pocket?) upon crossing threshold of injury/on sense of terminal threat? Could that be it? A point of comparison glimmered in the encyclopaedic depths of her mind: a sword. Angel Halo? Then she backtracked to consider the standing premise. Suppose high-level regeneration. Simple instigation/acceleration of organic processes, or radical intervention? Must check with cross-references.*

She began flinging out arrows to other segments of her archive. *Lernaean Hydra* was one. Another with over a dozen subsections simply read *Doctor*. A third, *Zerg*, made her pause and cogitate furiously for a while on whether her comparative research on essence/form versus life/death paradigms had anything pertinent to add. Then a fourth connection; she vacillated halfway up this line as it crossed into a red box labelled *Apoptosis - Handle With Care*, then drew it to the end with resolve: *Adramelech*. This brought her a frown, and she was pleased with herself for having impressed on Dari the unsettling destinations, however remote, that her power potentially made available to her. Or...she scribbled another note – *Felaryan regeneration?* – and gave Dari a great suggestive lick.

*Ooh, just you wait till you've seen some of the worlds which yet await you. A delectable thing like you will be scooped up so fast you'll never touch the ground...*

She swerved back to the first panel to resume her central line of inquiry. *Alterations to cutey's structure or composition. She lapped at her squirming Dari-sweet a few times more, then decided: No. Aside from core, no taste of structural change. Healthy and vigorous human woman, with all the tremendous latent power that entails, excepting unique caveat that it does not undermine Dari's Bargain, i.e. does not dilute her critical susceptibility to women with an integrative interest in her. Try something else. How about...exotic chemical reaction between common digestive fluids and cutey's body?*

This notion seemed to excite her. While she rummaged through the possibilities, her tongue instinctively carried Dari right up against the inside of her lips, which, sensing her pressed to them, held firmly shut, but with just enough give that her legs were allowed to slide out through their soft compression. As they began to kick, a gigantic thumb and two fingers swept up and pinned them together as the much larger woman, still engrossed in her conjectures, proceeded to slide the immobilised Dari in and out like a lollipop, from chest to knees, over and over in slow and lubricating motions. She was casting in a bizarre and intriguing direction now, and keeping one hand engaged in her entertainment, the other brainstormed notes for further examination. *Hmm...Daric acid? Or...hitherto undiscovered enzyme with controlled metaphysical absorptive function, assembled only in reaction to this little one's unique cuteness composition?*

She liked that one. She liked it a lot. Of course, this hypothesised enzyme would want a name. Her eyes flickered with mischief. *How about...Snuggleinic Dariase?*

The lollipop was fastened in place for a moment as the possibilities approached critical mass in Eclipse's cogitations. This was a proper puzzle, of a complexity that only occurred two or three times in a civilisational life cycle. Excitement and frustration bubbled together in her breast, clashing with ever fiercer intensity: she was so close, felt convinced she could work this out. And yet, and yet...no matter what information her lips extracted from the little creature, there seemed always some obscurity, some convoluted fissure in her matrix of knowledge through which the answer slipped away then taunted for her to keep up.

No matter. Eclipse rose to challenges. If Dari was hiding something, she would extract it.

*Hold tight, little one.* It was the first time she had addressed her fascinating little captive since the start of this exercise, and she knew the instruction was impractical, that was why it felt so fun: Dari could do no more than twist weakly in the midst of her lollipop experience. But for the next phase of the work even this would be beyond her; all she would manage was an intense sequence of squeaks as those colossal lips sucked her in in a single instant, kissed her into their

moist and mountainous softness as tight as they could, and proceeded to suck-suck-suck on her, clothes and all.

*What are you keeping from me, my little suck-sweet? Is it the enzymes? I bet that's it. You're - mmh - so sweet that even those digestive enzymes find you irresistibly cute, and they press themselves into you as though each wishes you were its size so it could glomp you up in its active site and cuddle you back to its glands. Mmm, yes. So your lipids don't break down properly, because they're the most fun to squash - mhm, like that - and your proteins don't break down properly, because they're what give you the strength for such wonderful wiggles - mhm - and your sugars - mmhm, mmm! - oh, your sweet, sugary sugars, what lucky little enzyme could possibly tidy those away if it meant no longer getting to slurp on your sweetness on and on and on? So instead their stomachs must come up with a new enzyme designed specially for you, and it lifts you up to a conjectural layer of reality where it can release your nutrients for its host while simultaneously protecting your lovable structures from destabilisation. Which, of course, causes problems on the physical plane, because its inconvenient rules make it impossible for both those states to pertain at once; thus giving rise, by the remainder of this process that your scrumptious body is going to tell me all about, to the behaviour of your core! Is that the answer, my adorable sugar mouse? I will - mmm - attain - mmm - understanding. I will - mmm - ohh, you delicious, delicious thing...*

Eclipse shut her eyes and reclined with her hands behind her head, savouring the taste not only of the little one's body but her emotions, her memories, her adorable perpetual-prey instincts and her bashful yet plucky libido with its sliver of a connection to said instincts, so shy and elusive yet a rabbit in the spotlights for Eclipse's oral juggernaut.

Eventually she slowed the pace of her established and respectable methodology, loosening her lips just enough to feel the tiniest of squirms start up again; and in reaction clenched her lips tight and sucked with relish once more, again, and again, and at that point, tasted the sharp zest of something remarkable.

*Ooh, now here's a surprise. Improvements. Her core's been enhanced well beyond its original capabilities. Two, no, three layers? I couldn't tease them apart at first. Mmm...this is not the work of amateurs. Oohh, that tastes good! Such love! Such incredible love! There's no mistaking this: they found this power in you and did not even think of pursuing it for themselves, did they? No, they added power of their own, just for you: all out of care and concern for their dear little friend...*

Eclipse sucked onward, periodically funnelling more oral fluid over the girl to vary up her therapeutic experience (because whether its experiencer thought of it as such or not, Eclipse did in fact know better). Then she stilled her lips and decided to try something.

*Little Dari? She spoke to her directly. A question for you. Do you believe a human like you can be alive and dead at the same time?*

In her present position Dari did not find this an encouraging line of inquiry. Soaked to the skin and tingling with pheromones from her infinite kiss, she had no confidence at any rate that Eclipse could hear her out there, having misplaced her knowledge that she could in the deep seas of self-conscious playthingness. All she could manage was a whimper.

The back-and-forth squidging of her body resumed, now with additional commentary.

*Suppose for argument's sake she can. Do you think such a human would be essentially alive but with attributes of death? Or essentially dead but with attributes of life? Or, somehow, a stable existence balanced between the both? Or – her lips, animated by this thought experiment, grew relentless in their work – does it mean this human enters a new state entirely, in the analysis of which the assumption of a binary tension between life and death becomes useless and is thus brought fundamentally into question?*

She reached up and rotated her impromptu sweetmeat ninety degrees, tucking her in sideways so her lips could smother all of her at once. Suck, suck, suck.

*Have you never thought about it, my flavoursome little lady? Surely you must have, with friends like yours. I am given to understand you've grown close to a spirited and energetic zombie from one of my favourite worlds, who holds such obvious dedication to your well-being, and – mmm! – who works so hard to keep you fit. So then. This...personal trainer of yours. Is she alive, or is she dead? Both, or neither? Or does the very fact she exists dispense with the question? Is it a problem, if it does? If so, where is that problem located? Is it her fault for being undead, or the question's fault for the inadequate terms in which it is framed?*

Eclipse paused her sucking, allowing her lips to chew absent-mindedly on their confection.

*Mhm. Next time you see her, ask her about the time she had tea with that funny old fellow back before you were born. He was from your old world too, you know? Came and went a lot; I don't think he felt particularly understood there either. Liked talking with undead people.*

An entertaining diversion, thought Eclipse, shutting her eyes and giving her wings a shake-out. But still important to the matter at hand. For there was no getting around it. She had to concede that the little one knew nothing beyond her years of accumulated supposition about the nature of her mysterious core, and that despite the irresistible might with which Eclipse's lips wrung the core itself for answers, it was refusing to give up its secrets.

*So it's like that then. Alright.* Her eyes flashed, because its successful resistance, she realised, could only mean one thing.

*These kinds of high-energy protective and restorative processes most commonly exist as environmental properties, not portable instruments. Case in point: Felaryan soil. But – and here's the thing – they are almost invariably imbued into the general*



*properties of whole worlds or regions, either by original design, which is why we associate them with worlds engineered from the top down, or by some global or universal extreme event. What is remarkable in the case of my little friend is that she has come into it strictly as an individual, unrecorded, inscrutable even to my perspicacious tongue – isn't it perspicacious, Dari? Poke, poke – and furthermore, that she did so there, of all places...*

Yet there was no doubt about it. Somehow, somewhere, a being of her own ontological magnitude had been involved either in giving rise to that mutation in Dari, if a mutation was what it was, or in orchestrating the conditions in which it had come to occur. But *who*, then? *How*? By manipulating the development of that shrinking device, for instance? Or by putting something in Dari's tea? Most importantly, *why*?

This complicated things. A lot. It would require further investigation that Dari couldn't help with. Nor would her sisters, certainly candidates, likely provide any answers: only seldom were Eclipse's kind known to interfere in the matters of Dari's world of origin. Its inhabitants had generated outputs antithetical to everything Eclipse's people were made of, which disturbed and horrified all of her kind, disturbed and horrified *her*; yet they also fascinated her, demanded her personal attention. How could they represent cosmic perils when so many of them were sweet and harmless little dumplings like this one?

Eclipse ceased sucking and frowned, with the effect of compressing her toy and impelling her to wiggle again.

*You squirm a great deal, little Dari-dumpling. I think you've set a record. I suppose you can't help it can you? But, you do realise it feels so delightful that one cannot then help but squash you in tighter?*

She'd have to come back to the matter of the core another time. The only thing clear, and it would have to do for now, was that every environment, digestive or otherwise, that had engaged Dari's core had triggered processes so impressively profound that they dispensed with fundamental binaries. That is, they exhibited that so-elusive undecidability of things that managed to be simultaneously both of life and of death, both whole and fragmented, both giving and receiving, both independent and part of someone greater; indeed, attained a space in which such distinctions became meaningless. Only such a space could have supported the processes necessary for such an impressive operation: the kind of space which could not operate, could not be understood, merely within the realities. No, in those moments they, and by extension Dari, were in touch with things *under* and *between*; with the spaces, that is, where only sentiences like Eclipse soared free.

*Well that at least explains the matter of the rifts. To be physically brought in contact with those spaces, even for a fraction of a beat of time, is to at once understand at a sub-atomic level the relativity, the contingency of all these curtains that crisscross the grand stage. It is then a small matter to see where the edges sway*

*and tug them aside, and for such a cute little bug, a scurry through needs only the slightest parting.*

Eclipse, of course, had lived most of her life on that level and so could lift, push down or brush aside those walls between worlds at will. Dari's understanding was only the first step on a long, long voyage that few people ever completed. Eclipse had completed it, and therefore held the true understanding: that walls don't exist.

Gathering together all her postulations into a single list, she inscribed one more, in bolder letters than the rest: *Transcendental Processes, Not Otherwise Specified*. She underlined it twice, then shut off the nest of displays and spun around in her soft plushy lounge, tilting it back as she stretched out for some well-deserved relaxation. She felt around with her tongue, finding her curious young human had rolled down behind her lower lip and was holding herself there against the gums, catching her breath.

*How are you doing in there? Ready for some more?*

Admitting that it must have been quite the workout for the tiny traveller, Eclipse allowed her a few moments of relief before plucking her up with the tip of her tongue in one skilful motion and rolling her up and away again.

*I had better not trouble the innocent little thing with these discoveries, she decided. My explanations would only give her a headache so long as she bears any weight of boxes and binaries from her world of origin. They fasten the belts so tight there, etch the labels with such severity, but her wanderings are already proving effective at – ehe – rubbing them off. Better let her keep her simpler version for now, rather than stress her with drops into metaphysical labyrinths.*

A scene coalesced in Eclipse's imagination in which a slightly older potential Dari, say in twenty years or two thousand, now with a splendid teal drape round her shoulders, a formidable glint in her nonetheless still rabbitry hazel eyes and, of course, a nifty cap on her head, came barrelling through a rift to land in Eclipse's hair, clambered fumingly out of it then yelled with a kick to her horns: "You mean you knew it was something like that all along? Oohh! Why didn't you tell me, you great winged and glorified horny library you? Y-You – you stuck me into you so many times to talk my ears off, so why didn't you tell me?!"

Eclipse giggled, which the besieged Dari of the present experienced as a tongue-quake.

*Ah well. Let's fly over that bridge when we come to it.*

## 食

Trapped on her oral rollercoaster ride, Dari had shared little in the intellectual side of the investigation into which she had so credulously allowed herself to be drawn. Instead she was getting the hot, wet and glutinous side of things, and at an hour in she was still berating her soaked little self for always being so trusting.

“You asked for this Dari,” she reprimanded herself as she was wrapped and lifted away in Eclipse’s tongue. “You could see the way she was grinning at you, you knew she wss glmmph mfff nnnnfff...”

She shivered at the brushing embrace of millions of sensitive tastebuds; groped in the dark for a seam between the coils of this cone of tongue all while knowing they were too tightly packed to slip her hands in, too heavy to budge even if she could. As those feelers soaked in the squirms and moans that her train of instincts hurtled on to supply, they also pinned her against the whiteboard of her own higher consciousness in the rear. It was now in the throes of a full presentation, with the threat of PowerPoint slides, about her hundred errors for which a session as a living throat lozenge was a fair and fitting consequence.

Dari had been in similar situations more times than she cared to remember, but as seemed the course for Eclipse, the gurgling cavern of this maw swamped her in an overwhelming enormity that seemed to come from more than its physical size; from more, indeed, than her apprehension at those two little fangs, mercifully unpretentious in scale, that she now sighted on this cosmo-succubus woman’s upper row of teeth. While avalanched in those lips or scooped up by that tongue for another ride, it felt as though some aspect of the laws of physics themselves were sucking on Dari’s tiny body, wrapping and licking and bouncing and squeezing and shoving her through the full catalogue of arrangements for which a mouth’s equipment was capable. The sensation of *no escape*, so operative in her consciousness at times like these, was here not merely an understatement. It was a non-statement. *Escape* did not exist. It had been conceptually abolished.

This soak in the transcendental made it no less physical. And judging by the great moans and hums that reverberated in from beyond the case of tongue-flesh, the fun in which Eclipse was revelling was as material as that of any of the lustiest behemoths down in those realities where the “reasonable” giantesses lived. The paradox might have vexed her much more were she not being vexed in more meatily and slobberingly immediate ways.

“Glmmph...! Cmmm nn!”

Every time the taste buds’ brushing started to slow, they tricked Dari’s senses into believing they were about to release her only to suddenly and remorselessly start massaging her again in the other direction. If they did at last let her go, it was only for long enough to catch her breath before she was lifted away for a sustained knead in Eclipse’s cheeks, or propelled forward into the luxurious clasp of those lips for another crush in their gravity well of kisses. It was the nature of such things to feel endless, but after a time the beleaguered itinerant wondered if even by her standards, this was a little much. After all, in her travels on the great gastroenterological highways, the mouth was usually but a checkpoint; one where she often found herself detained and inspected at length, to be sure, but rarely for such length as made her doubt she’d be either sent back or sent on.

But by then her need to wonder was near its end, for when she next found herself capable of motion – gasping for breath, spooling off what magic-saliva she could with her arms, sprawled in supine relief on that tongue which swelled underneath like an innocent carpet that had only been sleeping there the whole time – the sublime voice, which after its earlier exchanges had been content to leave her squealing to herself in this sensuous swamp, at last saw fit to remind her of its attention.

*How are you holding up in there, dear little Dari-dumpling?*

“I’m...haah...not...haah...a dumpling...”

The tongue rumbled ominous beneath her, as though to suggest a difference of opinion. Okay, I guess I am sort of a dumpling, Dari’s mind gently corrected her.

*You will be overjoyed to learn that my investigation proceeds magnificently. Your delicious little body is yielding up so much information about you, each portion more delectable than the last. You, little Dari, are a feast!*

I guess I should be thankful, Dari thought. She can eat everything she wants of me with her mouth, without making me go through everything that usually happens.

*I have satisfied my objectives for this session. And because you’re such a treat, it didn’t take nearly as long as I believed it might.*

Dari flashed to attention and scrambled into a sitting position on Eclipse’s tongue, trying to decide whether she should speak out to her lips or in to her throat.

“D-Does that mean...haah...y-you’re letting me out?”

Actually...

Uh-oh. There it was. Dari’s heart sank.

*I have what I sought what it comes to my primary concerns. Yet you make me so curious, and there remains so much I could learn of you. Surely you will not object to staying put for just the standard full three cycles, that I might indulge in a more thorough understanding?*

Dari winced, but slipped quick to the resignation that, alright, maybe that wasn’t too bad. It was rare enough that she even be given a say in it, though she suspected any objection would have made little difference (wrongly as it turned out; had she said no, Eclipse would have honoured it). Three cycles, she said she wanted, which Dari’s tongue-beleaguered consciousness parsed as three hours. Well she must have put up with at least an hour and a half already.

As some deep voice of wisdom within her screamed No! and demanded to know what the heck she was doing, Dari pronounced: “Um...o-okay...”

*Splendid! Well then, come here Dari-dumpling.*

The dormant landmass beneath awakened once more. As it knocked her onto her side and rolled her squeakingly away, she became aware that her treacherous higher brain had kept itself occupied in its present wealth of spare time, the

collaborating scoundrel, by learning to distinguish this mouth's different patterns of engagement and sorting them with historical labels excavated at random from her memories. Right now for example the rolled-up tongue with Dari in the middle had been raised between Eclipse's teeth, which were gently applying pressure from above and below to squish-spread the magic saliva over her and make her feel even more squashed. This, rather morbidly, was 'the Genghis Khan', from a book she had read once that claimed the thirteenth-century Mongol conquerors were religiously prohibited from shedding the blood of royalty into the earth, so instead would roll up a defeated king in a carpet and have him trampled with horses. Other techniques she had unknowingly identified included 'the Moon-walk' (though it was more a Moon-bounce), 'the Tsushima' (one of the wettest), 'the Defenestration of Prague', and – more recent memories were also fair game it transpired – 'Urbosa's Land Reforms'.

"Nnnnngh," she mumbled, as she was squashed lengthwise out then in through the strong compress of those lips, again and again in one of the most energetic Defenestration sequences yet. "At least...nnngh...only three...mmhhh...three hours..."

The rolling stopped, stranding her in the perfect tightness of a lip press.

*Three cycles, Eclipse corrected her. A standard session is three cycles. Not three hours. Oh you silly thing. Of course I could not expect you to be familiar with our reckoning of time, but why did you not ask me? Three cycles, in the conditions I keep in my lair, would correspond in your usual measure to – let's see – nine hours, precisely.*

Dari's eyes shot open.

"Whaa – mmmnnnfpff!!"

But by then the gigantic lips were already steamrolling her back and forth, five, six, seven more rolls; then on the thirty-third inward pass they shot her out onto the tongue, which wrestled her muscularly up to the heights and began to funnel her round and round with supplest dexterity, just as if she were locked in an luscious organic washing machine.

## 食

When time itself dissolved into meaningless; when the squirming ceased, and all became one with the sloshing, slurping rhythms of the universe; when even the shyest and most skittish part of Dari's nature crawled upon the verge of attaining the *Dao* of a plaything of a mouth with galactic lifespans' worth of practice; only then, as the concept of *then* was itself slipping off the precipice to oblivion, did a waterlogged and thoroughly tongued-out Dari find herself squeezed through those lips one last time. Eased out to the waist then jiggled so one leg followed,

she dangled by the other for a while, unresisting; then dropped into Eclipse's waiting palm, where she slumped in a puddle of exhaustion.

"Oohh...ohh my g-god...ohhh..."

Eclipse merely beamed. She waited to see if Dari would say more, and when she declined to, gently extended a fingertip and rolled her onto her side.

"Nnnnhhh..."

*Well someone's a wet little puppy. Hello there.*

"Ehh...nnnh...Eclipse..."

*Not quite your usual routine I imagine. Be at ease, little dumpling. I don't think the receptors in my mouth could squeeze more out of you even if they tried. And, mmm, look how squeaky clean you are! Don't worry, my oral fluid will dry out quick in the open air.*

Dari began to twitch her limbs, but Eclipse went *Shhh* and pressed her down with a calming finger. It traced her contours to her face where, finding her hair clogged together, it eased a nail through to loosen it.

*Relax. Take all the time you need.*

Having said that, the soft warmth of her hand was already evaporating the weird saliva, leaving Dari feeling unexpectedly toasty.

She sat up, grasping the end of Eclipse's finger for support. Everything felt surreal. Aside from the fast-receding fluids she also felt far less tired than she should after all the tossing and squashing and tumbling of her extended wash courtesy of Eclipse Laundromats. It was as though the liquids of that mouth had infusive properties, and had energised her as fast as the muscles and tissues wore her out.

*I told you those were good biscuits,* added her host, reclining into the distance much as a mountain range might, wings folded behind like looming storm systems. Dari averted her gaze and braced herself on that finger as she waited for her body to work out it was alright to breathe normally. Even now she didn't dare risk a stare at that bosom.

"Th-This...this is not what usually happens..."

*You were in no danger. I explained as much. You shall never hurt on my account, Dari-dumpling.*

"I'm not a...!"

*Mm, I suppose the name's not so fitting now you're out of my mouth.* She added quietly to herself: *We might have to come up with more suitable alternatives as we go on...*

She noticed Dari pinching at her green top. Her garments were drying slower than her skin and hair, and if she pulled at them then let go they slapped back with a *schlop*.

*Are you okay with your clothes there?*

"They're all soaked through..."

*Mhm. I wonder who did that?*

Dari shot her a surly glare.

*If you leave them to dry like that they'll get all creased. Why don't I help you get them off?*

*"Why don't - wh-what?!"*

Her eyelids set another record, transitioning from their narrowest to widest setting in a speed not measurable by conventional instruments. In an instant she had pulled her hands to her chest and was curling away, cheeks flushing like beacons.

*I'll give them back before you go of course. Your shoes and anklet too: they're just there, on the table-plant.*

*"N-No, it's not that...just...I mean..."*

*No need for embarrassment, my cute little friend. I have nothing but adoration and respect for your vigorous little body. I could disrobe too, if that would make you more comfortable?*

*"Eep! N-N-No, no need, that's okay! I..."*

*Or if you'd like to do it yourself, I could place you in my cleavage for some privacy?*

*"Nnnnnnn..."*

Stars alive she's precious, thought Eclipse with relish. Though the great visionary's face remained the very portrait of dignified benevolence, she surprised herself with the scale of effort required not to disclose how she was having the time of her life.

*Alright. Here, let me get your vest. Ea-sy!*

Four or five instantaneous motions were all it took, frighteningly, for the giant nail to whisk Dari's attire off her body. Her vest, top and skirt landed in a little pile at her side with her wristbands and undergarments on top, leaving the robust little adventurer to sit in an only slightly larger pile of blushing mortification, arms crossed over chest and knees bent close.

*Mmm*, went Eclipse, licking her lips as she began to prod and stroke with the same finger. To Dari's slight surprise, she found herself not as humiliated as she might be. Perhaps it was because this prodigious creature had already demonstrated, in extremely convincing fashion, the redundancy of clothes when it came to tonguing around into every little space in Dari's knowledge, feelings and memories, let alone her body. Eclipse for her part was adoring the little woman's manifold features on which your narrator shall now be excused from being over-particular, lest he one day get reminded the hard way that, at the same scale, the well-exercised Dari is taller and certainly considerably stronger than he is, to say nothing of her sizeable reinforcements, and might be inclined to administer him entirely deserved penalties on learning that, by being explicit about the strength of her regions, he broke the aura of speechless awe that is due to women's bodies.

A colossal thumb joined the finger to whip her heap of clothes away.

“H-Hey! Don’t...!” Dari began.

*I’m not going to eat them, little Dari. Do I look like a like like to you? You’ll get them back.*

“D-Do you look like a like what?”

*Mm. I’m shocked. You of all people still haven’t...heheheh. Eclipse gave an ominous giggle. Don’t worry. You will. Of course you will. It’ll be fun! Don’t let me spoil it.*

“F-Fun...” Dari repeated, nervously.

*Now then. Are you ready for further investigation?*

This time Dari tumbled right over. “W-What?! But...b-but I thought we were done – I thought you said...”

The great hand curled round her, index finger pressing perhaps a little harder than necessary on her chest, as Eclipse brought her close and held her up to her eyes.

*Listen to me, little Dari. You have stumbled onto a stage far grander than you yet realise. Extraordinary phenomena have chosen you as their vehicle, and I am in concord with that. But starting with your friends, others already know what resides in you. The number who do will only grow as you journey on, and not all of them will be people you want to meet.*

“Nnn...what do you...”

*Shh...listen for now, little Dari. The path you are on is long. At times you will find there is no path at all. You, by the will in your heart, shall have to create that path yourself with these adorable but mighty legs of yours – she squeezed them in her fingertips – and mighty they are, because they have already proved capable of exactly that. These legs have crossed worlds, and shall cross ten thousand more.*

Dari gaped. In the course of her travels she had come across plenty of civilisations whose people liked to wield impressive numbers like that, whether because they had sacred numerologies, found it rhetorically satisfying to do so, or were simply not good at counting. But she felt an awestruck hunch that Eclipse was not the sort to round up for the fun of it.

*When I collected you, it was because I was curious, I had my suspicions, and because, well, because you are Dari. But now that I comprehend the true stakes at play in your story, I am compelled by an overriding higher interest to complete the full course of your investigation.*

The all-too-familiar feedback loop began. Dari was wiggling; causing the hand around her to gently contract; whose warmth and pressure in turn stimulated her to further struggle...

“But, but that means...I thought...nine hours, in your mouth...”

*I told you that what you require is a triangulation. The measurements I took in my mouth were only the first set.*



That word again. Dari had forgotten it, but now it popped to the surface of her memory where it bobbed just as bewilderingly as it had the first time. Her baffled expression did not go unnoticed, and she thought she caught just a hint of a roll in the smoulder of those immeasurable eyes. The gigantic investigator was bending over; her other arm purposefully reaching down to rearrange something...

*You do know what a triangle is, right?*

"Of course I – aaack!"

The hand clutching Dari had begun a descent. Which from seasoned experience, she swiftly and with a rush of foreboding understood to be following an arc down to the rear of her titanic captor...

*And a triangle has how many reference points? How many angles? How many sides?*

...before coming to rest before an equally titanic landscape, whose vast slopes of smooth, swelling pinks and fuchsias rolled away with planetary grandeur. In its own right this was an unprecedented sight to her, but as those curves dragged all attention necessarily inwards, into the valley between, and from there to the shifting flesh-ringed singularity at its centre, Dari found the archetype to which this topography belonged was one with which she had an all too physical familiarity.

"Oh no," she muttered, the implications of Eclipse's terminology dawning at last. "Eclipse...you can't mean – eek! W-Wait!"

*That's right. Three. And unless I am mistaken, which is not a circumstance oft recorded, I have so far taken your measure at one point of observation. How many points yet remain, then, in order to complete a perfect triangle?*

Dari's mind raced fast, too fast, a full four seconds of incoherent floundering – that mouth, all that tonguing and squeezing and sucking; a triangle; a full session, nine hours; just one in three; that meant a second; and then, a third; nine hours – but all these insights were washed away as a surge of adrenaline squirmed her to the peak of her reflexes. It did nothing: that enchanting grip carried her into the valley as sure as night follows day. Another blink and there she was, right there in the presence of that hole, bare skin quivering in the warmth that geysered from the depths of that unimaginable body: warmth cleansing as the fresh cosmic winds yet fragrant with the potency of mineral riches forged in the hearts of stars. It was so close now, right in her face, she might have reached out to push at it were her arms not pinned by gigantic fingers but would she have dared? That crater, that mountainous ring, it pulsed so hungrily, seemed to sense she was there and grow impatient for its meal; for with a rumble the aperture drew apart, only a little, only enough to give her a glimpse of how dark and tight it was within before folding heavily shut on itself, then repeating the mesmerising motion again, and again, then yet once more with a pucker that gurgled through the subterranean depths.

No digestive system, the panicked Dari recalled; but what consolation was that, was anything, in the toothless jaws of a gargantuan beast like this?

*Did you hear me, little creature? How many locations still to go?*

“W-Wait! You don’t have to do this!” she cried out, her physical memory helpfully reminding her just what kind of experience she could expect in there. But all she got back was a reverberating sigh, as two fingers of that other great hand descended to gently, so gently, push that ring out, stretching its creases, to fix it in place at just-about-open. Then Dari’s whole world shifted; her arms fell loose, she instinctively thrust them out to push away, then squealed at the shock of finding her face, her arms, her entire upper body pressed in offering to that gluttonous ring of flesh.

*Come on, little Dari. Three, minus one, makes what?*

“Mmmphh!” was Dari’s only possible reply, as with a SCHLOP! a burst of suction slurped her in.

Engulfed down to the chest, a tactile thunderstorm rippled through Dari’s naked skin in that moment; and yet, rather than push her all the way in, those goddess-fingers pinched her up to the waist, slid her in only that far, and then, somehow, defied momentum to hold her in place there. It was as though Dari was suspended in time as much as in sphincter, in a liminal state both in and out but not entirely one or the other; yet time still ran, and with Eclipse’s fingers pinching her waist her protruding legs kicked wildly in the air. Logically the mechanism of that circular muscle should have resolved her insertion at once: either there had been enough force to push her through, or too little to prevent her rejection; but Eclipse, that mistress of liminal spaces, was playing to a set of rules all her own. She sighed in bliss, both at her taste of the stranded spelunker’s compressed agitation and the incredible sensations it sent rocketing through her being.

*O-hhhh, yes! Her elation pulsed the container of Dari’s pulpy world. There, right there, that implosion of stimulus right there: mmm, isn’t that just so good? That first contact, ohhh, that which makes you feel tiniest of all...ohh, Dari! How does it feel, as you are sucked into a living black hole of soft, fat woman-matter, so thick that for just a heartbeat, just before the wormhole within hoists you up and away, you are ringed in that press for all time? Ohhh, here you go then, you magical little thing. Have a longer taste this time – yes, yes! Taste, in all your flesh, the power of life on the threshold!*

Trapped in an intermediate condition that should not have been physically possible, Dari’s body was saturated with stimulations that threatened to sweep her up to a realm of existence far beyond her means. Electrified in the ascension, feeling those transcendental but oh-so-fleshly energies overwhelm the only existence she knew, she writhed as though she had never writhed before.

“Mmmph! Mmmmmmmphh!! Mmmmmphh!!”

Just one taste of infinity – just enough – and then a fingertip pressed on her back and pushed her onward, into the abyss. She felt that fleshy immensity compress heavily round her legs, but it was at that moment Eclipse released her spell, and with a *schlip!* Dari was lapped away as the tunnel, its appetite sated, clomped shut behind her.

Eclipse stood, resting her hands on her buttocks as she felt for the tiny human now stashed deep in between. A subtle press, and there was the imprint of that little shape: that cute face; the arms locked to her sides (a swift jiggle slid them round to her front); those tough little legs, which had mountains to climb and oceans to swim but for now were prescribed a rest from their labours; there, right there, was the inimitable shape of her tiny friend, tucked safely away in her warm snug vault and ready for some rigorous attention.

Eclipse left the panels and strode across the chamber, making for her great nest of loungers, cushions and, yes, a small collection of plushy animals, unidentifiable in human languages, who had stood by her side since the earliest dawns of her enterprise. Books of one thousand varieties lined the neat little shelves around this den, where she came when she wanted to read, taste or think without the compulsion to summarily deconstruct everything put before her. And so it would be for her session with the utterly and marvellously flustered Dari, who, as Eclipse sat down, was worked a little further in by those gluteal muscles till she lodged securely in place.

Eclipse gave a subdued cry of pleasure as she let her buttocks relax, feeling them sandwich their twitching captive deep within.

*Tapón de Dari*, she thought. *Mm!*

## 食

Eclipse shook off her boots, then raised and crossed her legs on the cushions (with an especially cushioning effect for her passenger). She brought the spaded tip of her tail up too and rested it behind her, where it lay like a slumbering mythical guard dog, ready to snap awake and pounce on anyone who came for the treasure stashed in its cave.

Then she meditated.

The realities faded till all there was was Eclipse and Dari (which made no difference to Dari, for whom this was not a change in perspective). Now she could concentrate. She would fill the universes back in with the two of them and their growing bond as the focal point. Following the tendrils of meaning that branched from both their backs, she could explore Dari's relationships: with people, with worlds, with the fabric beneath (that is, of reality, not specifically Eclipse's trousers), and draw on her own to consider helpful connections.

That little Dari-shaped mass within her felt so good. Not just on account of the physical sensation: her beloved little friend, so snug and secure in the protective clasp of her cellar. It was more than that, and if she shut off all other sensations and felt, really *felt*, she could just about touch the final background of all existence, that level beyond which no explanations remained. There. There it was again: the exact frequency. Perfect resonance with the framework of all things.

It felt good to keep Dari there because she was *supposed* to keep Dari there. It was the Way.

She was tempted to go still further. Between where Dari was now and her lodgings of just a short while ago stretched a labyrinth of tubes, sacs, glands and assorted tissues that had long, long ago been Eclipse's digestive passage. It had been a small matter, requiring merely a few thousand years, to metamorphose it to a form better suited for her contemporary purposes. Each structure had its own shape and texture: there were smooth ones, bumpy ones that swelled with rubbery spheres, others with membranes she could fold tiny people up in, and others packed with tendrils that were specially enlarged adaptations of her original intestinal cilia, so ideal for administering a tentacle bath. There were also countless fluid and pheromone blends her glands could squirt in to wash, lubricate, infuse or otherwise captivate her playthings, and such was her impeccable standard of hygiene that she had her fearsome immune system keep the whole maze clean and fresh in perpetuity.

She longed to siphon Dari in there right this minute. She could keep her in there for days, enraptured in a paradise of dedicated sensuous provision. But no, she had promised her little friend a specific procedure, so she would keep to it and save that treat for another time. To do otherwise would be unethical.

*Oh by the stars, she's still blushing. Well there's only one answer for that: squeeeeeee-ze! Ohh, so good...*

Coming down from the rush she opened her eyes, and as usual, for she had set it out this way, the first thing she saw was her maps on the walls. They filled the spaces between the bookshelves: star charts, maps of her favourite worlds, and plots of the rifts between realities colour-coded on a thirteen-grade scale in order of complexity. Some were stylised masterpieces Eclipse had picked up off (or with) their cartographers, who by the nature of their vocation are necessarily eccentric and thereby worthy of her attention. But most of the technical maps she had drawn herself. Cartography was something she dabbled in at best, but she was still one of the only people she knew who could perfectly represent a three-dimensional surface – say, a spherical planet – on a two-dimensional chart without receiving an angry letter from Mathematics.

The largest map was one such. An ocean world with three or four major landmasses divided into some half a dozen continents depending on how you counted, as well as many islands large and small. The whole thing was rendered

to such fine resolution that she could follow individual inhabitants as they wandered about in real time.

The bats – tiny, fuzzy – were her favourite.

Here was her other principal objective in picking up Dari. The one she hadn't told her about. This world, the world where the little explorer's journey began, was a problem.

It was extremely difficult to interact with its people. Eclipse's sisters understood the matter well: every few megacycles they were ramping up its grade on a certain official scale which no world wants to be on, each of whose twenty-two ranks denoted an increasing severity of conditions existentially hazardous to love-based life. It had lately flipped to nineteen, already alarming in the extreme considering the people who lived on it were themselves love-capable beings; the wiggling one in her fleshly confines, case in point. Yet they were also responsible, inexplicably thus far, for generating the most dangerous forces in the cosmos.

It wasn't that Eclipse's kind would abandon creatures in such distress. Rather, they suspected the corruptions prevalent in that world to have thickened so far as to penetrate to the very deepest layers of reality and, once there, to tear it open, unleashing nightmares which, as a matter of fundamental interaction, her people materially could not approach and vice versa. The best they could do was reach out to receptive individuals through dreams or other indirect and surreptitious methods. Going in person was out of the question.

*They do not stray far from home, either,* she contemplated. She was once more keeping her musings from Dari, but did cast a glance over her shoulder. *Most of the time.*

She meant it in more than geographic terms. The crux of the trouble was simple. These were beautifully varied people, each individual as complex and unique as the one inside her. And yet, impossibly, they had come up with an idea for which no word existed in the universal language of her kind. It was the belief that every person was the same. And as by nature they were not the same, this duly morphed into the belief that each *should* be the same; and when reality continued to frustrate it, the *should* took to flames as a violent *must*.

This notion of violent conformity branched into endless varieties, each as nonsensical as the last, till they ended up with competing samenesses that often came rigidly partitioned, stacked into moral hierarchies, or split into in-groups and out-groups. They might so reduce and divide based on what people looked like; where they came from; their sexual characteristics; or even their beliefs about the truths of a universe of which they still knew only a fraction of a fraction.

What Eclipse's kind did have a word for was the outcome of such a dynamic, and this time it was that world's own most prominent languages that lacked an equivalent, a fact which in itself said it all. The closest they could come might be 'the opposite of love', but this lacked the horrific overtones inherent in the concept.

The consequence? Perpetual catastrophe. Ugly, meaningless death and suffering in forms the cosmic fabric could not support, on scales beyond calculation – repeated, massively, over each generation.

This saddened her greatly. The life which gave rise to it also showed an incredible faculty for creativity and understanding; indeed, had based their finest accomplishments on the power of their imaginations. That imaginative reach allowed them to think and feel to degrees of complexity far beyond the frontiers of their immediate reality, making them perfect candidates to penetrate to those levels where the rifts came into reach – if only not for ‘the opposite of love’. That corruption had twisted their imaginative power against themselves, locking their minds, never mind their bodies, in dungeons of unforgiving conformity expectations. To imagine out of place, let alone to behave so, was to invite a ladder of remorseless suppressions and abuses. She had learnt that at times they even went so far as to deem critical or unusual thinking an illness, as though the pursuit of sameness had become a consciously self-reinforcing system reacting with frenzied paranoia to every question in which it saw the seeds of its own ruin. Writ large, the effect was to keep the majority of that world’s people crushed to a fraction of their potential.

In other words, instead of nurturing their desires to explore the realities like Dari, all too often their lives consisted in a denial of all realities except for that which they imagined to be their single one. And that was rarely even their true reality, for what is such a thing when worlds in general contain countless realities and theirs in particular was built on layers of imagined ones, made real through the power of stories: nations, ideologies, money, companies, fashions, laws, gods? But in the hands of ‘the opposite of love’ such stories became machines of terrible self-destruction, slamming portcullises over all realities other than their own as they thrashed in the terror of what would happen if the truth got out: if it was realised that the imagined realities they depended on were not One True Realities.

Eclipse had watched this transpire from the beginning. She had agonised over it in this very den more times than there were tiny strands of violet fur in her wings. Hers was the ambition to bridge all realities, to bring their peoples together in an ever-brighter network of togetherness, the grandest orchestra of love yet known. It fell personally to her, she believed, to crack the dread riddle of this world known as Earth.

She smiled, because perhaps she had the key right there in her keyhole.

*You could be doing worse, you know,* she communicated to Dari. *Your people seem to spend as much time up their own orifices as you get in cosy and comfortable ones.* But the little prisoner wriggling in said cosy and comfortable dungeon was too deep in a swell of awkward cringing to properly register this offering, and at any rate had not received its context, so no reaction was forthcoming. Finding this cute, Eclipse bounced teasingly on her seat, experiencing a satisfying shiver of pleasure as her captive was shifted just a fraction deeper.

Dari lived on energies that gave the lie to her people's illusions. Happening on the power to act on those energies, she had ridden them to the stars. For all her bodily confinements, her heart had grown unstoppable. She was free: so free that it was no longer possible to call her Dari of Earth, still less Dari of that especially troubled example of its societies from which she had come. As a wanderer of the worlds, that vocation Eclipse admired and respected most, she had flourished. Her home was everywhere, in the hearts (to say nothing of other organs) of friends who might reside anywhere at all. The technical term the scientists of her world of origin might have applied to her in her current capacity – 'rectal foreign body' – would have been incorrect.

In other words, and keeping with their idioms, she had dodged a bullet. Her peoples' conformism had failed to suppress her, and after what her travels had shown her it would never get the chance to again. Onto her wider stage she had carried the best of her species's potential. Developed enough, her energy represented an antidote: could deliver them from its worst. Deliver them all.

*Cosmic significance. Right...there. That's why, little Dari. That's why.*

So much of that world's problem energy, that sameness energy, seemed to target their nature as sexual creatures. Assuming strategic agency, it made sense: poison their crucibles of joy; turn those instead to crucibles of anguish. Eclipse had striven to keep track of it, to keep an organised scheme of the seemingly countless ways in which it demanded, say, male sameness and female sameness, interaction samenesses, relationship samenesses, but in the end she just gave up. There were too many, each infernal bud sprouting six or seven more till this strangling obsession with negating themselves as diverse, love-capable beings dug its vines into all aspects of their lives.

*Even supreme delights like Dari's have been cast to the margins, she sighed, feeling automatically for one of her plushies and caressing its fur. She's a bookish one. Suppose one day she gets her bashfulness under control for long enough to share what she writes of her adventures. A decisive mass of her people as they are now could not handle her truth; her story would not be tolerable to these attitudes that keep their flesh in chains. Those who would hear them are cast to the margins, their tales shared only in whispers. Shame and stigma are dealt forth. Masterpieces ripped from their frames. Bookstore windows would be smashed; supportive voices ostracised; embassies set on fire. Streets would fill with shouts and placards labelling her friends cannibals – which is quite the audacity, really, from lifeforms who have structured their societies to feed on the energies of their meekest and kindest, doing them to fodder for the ravening appetites of those who hold power.*

*Or, they would misinterpret, seek to claim her for their own dislocated narratives. Their affront to the power of women, their assault on our magnitude, and its mirror effect that mutates their cute little boys in service of a twisted power fantasy: nowhere else in all the worlds is such an impossibility known. As a hammer reduces*

*every problem to a nail, might they seek to frame Dari's challenges through that tainted lens? Then they would fail. This one's no victim, needs no rescuing; a tough and resilient girl who just happens to have a gentle heart, an endearing weakness for larger women, and that small matter of a bargain with reality that, to the untrained eye, might seem to bring that weakness out in disproportion...*

*She smiled, but her eyes were sad. She hugged her plushy close. By the stars, it's forlorn. How many millions of them spend their whole lives never knowing such excitement as Dari's because they are surrounded by those who seal their windows shut on it? How many bodies will never feel the thrill of a hand like mine, reaching for them through those windows? No, worse: how many will never know even how to imagine it, though their hearts cry with longing, because their information environments filter out all stories and images that could teach them how?*

*If this is allowed to continue, that world's deleterious outcomes could reach far beyond its limits. I cannot look the other way. Each time I look back the tendrils have grown, and I am minded ever more to intervene regardless of the risks...*

*But enough, she decided. There was no purpose cycling through this same sequence again and again. It was always the same; always ended on the chilling weight of that note. There had to be a better way, and thinking that, she returned her attention to her little guest. Might Dari just perhaps fit as snug in her grand strategy as in her present accommodations?*

*All that was your journey's umbilical, little Dari. Has it truly snapped as you insist? You hide it away, but squeeze hard – like...that! – and I can feel it. You retain a sliver of silent concern for the world you started in, in spite of the dissonance that so defined your involvements there.*

*She exhaled. Deep within her, smooth and rippling tubular walls rolled in heaving waves, rubbing the skin of the tiny form in their hold. Rather than Dari's general instincts or the core in her chest, it was her mind – her stories, her truths, her dreams – Eclipse wanted now, so she focused those kneading motions on Dari's head and shoulders. She could feel the brush of her mousey hair; her little nose, and those oh-so-squishable hot cheeks; the barely-traceable imprint of the scar on her forehead, a forest's gift to a dear child of clumsier days long gone by; and of course, those lips whose peeps it felt so gratifying to smother. The tissues of what had once been Eclipse's rectum were supple, firm, and just soft enough to insulate their captive from the unyielding muscles behind them; perfectly adapted, in other words, for a harder, more empirical massaging-out of a person's meaning.*

*Mm...you have an impressive grasp of the power of stories for one so youthful, you tiny thing you.*

*Eclipse had tasted it already – that tongue missed nothing – but now she could get right up close to the books on the shelves of Dari's internal library. She could feel the textures of their covers, the quality of their paper, the pages where the little one had left her bookmarks.*



*You hunger to learn, to seek new things, to feel them with your own hands. Mmm, it's no wonder you have taken to the rifts like a little energy sprite. Even in your old life you were a little explorer, ever wishing not only to know what was out there, but to understand how it had come to – ooh! You liked caves, didn't you? Especially the ones with rivers and lakes inside. I never would have guessed!*

She realised what that meant – in general, not specifically the caves – and in a protective instinct clenched her warm Antarctic round its little occupant, holding her long in the almightiest of hugs.

*I wonder, cute Dari: what would have happened to you had you continued as you were, delving ever deeper into the buried memories of your old world? The path of the historian – is that what they call it? – is never straightforward in a reality as frayed as that. Would you have been prepared, when the time came, to plummet into the abyss of harrowing claws that pursue your kind through time? I have known of so many, even cuties like you, undone when they could no longer shield themselves from the floods of blood and tears that made that world as it is now. If given the choice, I daresay all of them, any day, would have preferred to plunge into the abysses that seem more to your liking...*

And still, that same history, with its unutterable amalgamation of cruelties and madneses and atrocities shambling down the corridors of time; that same history had given rise, spontaneously, to Dari. More paradoxes. She held a string of that history, even if she had borne it so far as for the ball of thread to fall out of sight. If she went far enough, then to see it again one day might be as to look on an alien planet. And yet, hers would still be the same string.

Eclipse clenched her rear again; but gently this time, jiggling to generate undulations within. Dari's path was unmarked, but the further she went, the closer to certain it became that she would cross the edge and reappear back on the other side: back where she had started.

*Your attunement to the rifts; the troubles your world projects upon all universes: bring these two facts alongside one another, and they funnel all paths to one inescapable outcome. One day, sooner or later, they must bring you back to the place you began, where to confront your journey with its greatest challenges of all.*

The reason went without saying. She was no longer of that world. She and those who interacted with her now wrote her story in a different language. On return to a reality so hostile to all other realities, what could she do communicate the lessons of hers to the majority of its people?

Eclipse deliberated on, still keeping her thoughts to herself. As before, these were burdens she did not feel her friend was ready for.

*Oh, little Dari. One day you of all people must surely learn the lesson of the Silver Branch, the truth that comes to all who cross the worlds: that you never go back, even when you do. Even if you set foot once more in the home from which you embarked, you are so changed by the journey – by your very condition as one who*

journeys – that a different reaction ensues. In every sense that matters, it is no longer the same place. Things once alien and frightening have become familiar – oh, how well you know this to be true; but in equal measure, what was once home becomes alien, and you are made strange to those who once looked to you for their reflection.

Thus: conflict. There was no way around it. The difference between their worlds, those people's fear of people who cross to other ones, would pose Dari a new class of struggle, one those sweet little tract-trained muscles would not suffice to handle. Political struggle.

But not yet, thank the stars. Not yet.

Would she break through to their natures, when that time came? Did they yet remember that they too were all migrants at heart, crossing like Dari from reality to reality in search of their futures? Could she be one, perhaps, just perhaps, to bring them all home?

*Carry on your journey, my little explorer. When the time comes to resume your explorations of your first reality, better to do it with the experience, examples, equipment and support of ten thousand realities on your back. Their weight will keep your story safe: keep it yours. But for now, I think you'll be sticking to the caves...*

She laughed, and gave her waist a twist back and forth; and with a little attentiveness, managed to manipulate the rubbing motions to roll Dari all the way around. Finding it fun, she did it again, back the other way. The little lady would need strong legs for the journey, Eclipse mused; so she tightened those contractions again and this time focused on Dari's lower half, administering a massage to that pair of shapes which, though delightful in their diminution, Eclipse well recognised as examples of one of the most awe-inspiring and indomitable structural motifs in all the realities. But then the wiggling grew too lovable to ignore, so she squeezed – panting with lustful affection – in a full compress, embedding her charge in a pack of devoted epithelium.

## 食

“Nnnnnggh! Mnnnnffhh...”

Deep in the netherworld, Dari had quite different things on her mind. A galactic mass of gluteal enormity for a start. Two, even.

These rear-entrance abductions into soaring vaults of womanly flesh had stunned her at first, but as they had grown into embarrassingly frequent fixtures on her itinerary, and goodness knows why, they had given her plenty of time for reflection. Though she knew they technically fed her into the same one-way system she usually joined from the correct end, the road conditions, so to say, were as different as on a highway which ran from a busy conurbation to a mountain wilderness. Coming down the top way, the roiling space of the stomach,

with all its disorienting scents, sizzling juices, throbbing walls and the thick stale heat of its air, was a high-tension environment which gave her perhaps half an hour to kick, stamp, yell complaints or otherwise mope in the corner (or, if the manner of her ingress had made her particularly mean-spirited, to attempt a small measure of revenge by devouring whatever her host sent down there with her: chocolate or pizza if she was lucky, vegetable matter if not) before her consciousness gave up and entrusted her life to her core. But the same realm's lower hinterlands were a different country. Their firm, fibrous walls clutched her so compact that their perpetual whole-body massage tended to gradually, eventually press through to the other side of her agitation and calm her back down. Theirs was a soft and insulated heat, the air somehow far more manageable than up above (she was too flustered to puzzle about why), and save for the cases of those individuals who possessed the rather disconcerting anatomical prowess to defy the one-way system – precipitating a lengthy journey, which she had only once or twice completed without passing out – the absence of hazards like noxious hazes, falling food, or (mysteriously) more disagreeable forms of matter associated with this region meant she usually got stowed away safe there for longer periods.

Much longer periods. If her host got distracted and forgot she was there or simply fell asleep, she would likely still be cringing in there when finally checked on. If she was lucky, and the rhythms of her living confines cooperatively steady, she might get some sleep herself. Nine hours in a maw was virtually unheard of, but nine hours of this, as she knew to her timorous aggravation, was nothing new.

So it had gone on Dari's first ever sacrifice to the sphincter monster, which had not been a purpose she had expected to be put to and whose dismay she had coped with by shutting her eyes, reminding herself it was part of a general situation still too implausible to be true, and wincing tight in the darkness as she did her best not to think about where she was. As her own flesh got used to acknowledging it was not in danger, her mind wandered instead to other places such as the mistakes she had to have made to end up in that predicament. Her confinements were often presented – if conveniently – as penalties for, say, trespassing in a drawer or article of clothing where a rift had happened to drop her, or getting sat on by accident, or of course that naughtiest crime of all: being simply too tiny and cute; and she had coped by taking these admonitions to heart, coming to a timid acceptance that this was indeed a fitting and reasonable reproof for a given monumental captress to deal her.

That was the mode in which she generally saw out these lengthy impoundings, and that she had found a mode at all was helpful, because for the women who caught her this had grown into as reliable a craving as scarfing her down. Just perhaps, she considered – though the thought turned her red as a squirrel – it was an alternative a small part of her secretly preferred, especially as she trembled beneath lewd countenances deciding on possible uses for her.

It had also helped with her timekeeping problem. Jumping from world to world, each with its own chronometric practices, seasonal patterns, annual and diurnal cycles and time zones (assuming they had such things at all) had played havoc with Dari's internal calendar, and after a dozen or so rifts she had just given up. Order was being restored however on account of a certain green-haired goddess, who, on a chance encounter that had got Dari stored for safekeeping in the manner described by way of a playful punishment, transpired to find herself so turned on by this experience that she had resolved to turn it into a regular ritual, reaching through rifts at the appointed time to scoop up the startled little traveller wherever she happened to be. Naturally Dari took the burden of responsibility all on herself each time those fingers finished funnelling her in and her fluster began to settle down ("Nnngh, just what were you thinking, biting a goddess on the bum?"), and it now happened with such punctuality that Dari had made the most of a sticky situation by coming to reckon her fortnights by it.

Nonetheless, all that rubbing incited her shyness glands in the extreme. These tunnels rarely tossed or tumbled her about as did most of the other terrains in her most well-used atlas; instead they fixed her immobile, pinned in a neverending mechanical rhythm of squeezes, rubs and massages. This sufficiently calmed her nerves to more or less stew her in her own sheepishness, an awkwardness further concentrated by the sheer self-conscious tininess induced by being stored away amidst such bountiful fatty reserves. She felt it most keenly of all when reminded by tremor after tremor that she was being carried; or in those moments her world went horizontal, followed by that slow, steady heaving and the sense that gravity was a remorseless bully, by which point she would know she was in for a very long night.

Of course, night became a meaningless concept in those pitch-dark burrows, all the more so in worlds like Eclipse's where she hadn't even been given the chance to work out its relevance. Nor would she need to, for she was rapidly discovering that there was only one time in here, Eclipse O'Clock, and moreover the appropriateness of Eclipse's name to the properties of this situation made her one abductress whose identity she would not forget in a hurry.

"Nine hours..." she had squeaked as muscular work began on her. "Nine hours...nine hours...nnn...nyah!..."

Then she realised that actually, no, perhaps time was not singular, because the proverbial wormhole (or was it literal? She had no clue anymore with this preposterously overpowered being) had begun to clasp and pound on her in ways that couldn't possibly be attributed to the customary set of involuntary background spasms. She didn't have to be the multiverse's leading specialist on the matter (although by now she probably was) to reckon that the intensity, or moreover the unquestionably *targeted* manner of her bowelhandling – now her head and shoulders, then her legs, then her chest, then her everything, then finally, and this really took the cake, rolling her around in a three-hundred-and-sixty-

degree motion – could only mean one thing: that Eclipse’s extraordinariness was measured not merely by the eloquence of her tone, nor the scope of her designs, but of all things, by the fine motor control she could exercise over her entrails.

Dari flushed with every press as she did her best to accept her fate. She felt this supermassive black hole embed her in the layer of soft, slick flesh that protected her from the infinite weight beyond yet did nothing to relieve it from her consciousness. Her confines baked her in a sultry warmth that tingled her with arousal, all the more so whenever those flesh-walls found an erogenous spot then muffled the squeak that resulted. When that happened her mouth tasted a thin fluid film, much like that she felt getting rubbed into her skin; its lubrication was of no help to the laughable notion of slipping out of there (again, conceptually abolished) but at least gave her a little leeway to twitch and so lessen the stiffness in her limbs. But what was worst about that coating was that when pressed to her lips, she found it tinged with an inviting sweetness; whose instant result was to split her in a three-way struggle as her tongue made probing licks of its own accord, her perfidious intellect made evidence-based excuses that anything Eclipse secreted was probably good for her health, and the rest of her, prostrate in the middle, seethed in feeble resentment as she demanded to know how they could both so humiliate her at a time her position could literally and figuratively be little lower.

*Ohh, that tiny tongue! Drink up, if you like.* The voice vibrated her surroundings for the first time since Eclipse O’Clock, which was somehow both right now and long, long ago. *I don’t believe you have a name for that solution – why would you? – but I’ve added a little extra sugar just because it’s you. There’s also lots of natural minerals in there which you probably ought to be getting more of for a...you know, a varied diet.*

“Mff mfff nnnfff nrrfff mff vrrnrrd dnnt!” Dari objected, only to get a pulpy squeeze on the face for her trouble.

*I hope you’re feeling safe and snug in there. Your work is most rewarding!*

The wall parted from Dari’s face, allowing her a gasp of breath.

“I...hhh...nnnnggh...hhh...wh-what...hhh...rewarding...”

She had muttered it to herself, but Eclipse responded:

*Rewarding, in that I cannot ascribe a high enough value to the information your dear little body is imparting on me right now. Mmm. You’re not going anywhere for now, you delicious bum-dumpling.*

“Nnghaahh...she d-didn’t...hhh...just call me that...”

But then Dari realised something else.

“Wh-What the – glmmph! You can – nnn – you can h-hear me even in here?”

*But of course. You and every sweet little neuron of yours that flickers from its hidey-hole herein.* Dari groaned as by way of indication her head and shoulders were squeezed through nine universes again.

“Th-This person...nnnhh...just what...nnnhhh...h-how can she...aahh, stop squashing me!”

*Come now. You know that’s like asking meteors to fall up. Like asking magnets to work on wood. Like mining for clocks. Like tossing sticks and expecting them to fall in the shape of a house. Like –*

“Argh, I get it! Nnngh...”

The walls were patting her all over now, in ominous preparation for a great big hug.

*Mmm, do you? You see, I might have – ehe – a respectable degree of agency at a meta-cosmic level, but even I feel obliged to show a little respect for the fundamental configurations. They’re not switches you just play around with you know. And as has become quite clear, there appears to be one with your name on it in adorable little green letters, and it just happens to be fixed on the setting where there is engraved this label, in beautiful calligraphy I might add, that reads: ‘Tuck Away’. I’ll admit I’d love to tell you it was I who broke the handle, but regrettably, I suspect someone else got there first. So on that note...*

SCHLOP!

“Mmmphh! Mmmclpss! Nnnmph mmmmph!”

As though to really cement her point this time, the walls of Eclipse’s hollow not only clasped Dari away like a favourite doll but began rubbing back and forth in opposite directions. For nine seconds of eternity, Dari was overcome by impossible stimulations that at any moment would surely carry her squealing away to a higher plane of existence...

And then they loosened, allowing her to float back to the quite mundane reality of panting for breath in the narrowness of a giantess’s basement.

“Ahh...nnnnggh...oh my god, wh-what...”

*Oh my Dari. And the answer to that ‘what’ is also Dari.*

“Nyaaaah...”

*Besides – I know you like it.*

That statement flushed the still-recovering Dari into a full-scale civil war, with armies of energised nerves and hormones rallying to the banner of Like Its to clash bitterly with those which came out to fly the colours of the No I Don’ts. After a series of dramatic battles whose fronts shifted back and forth across her body, the two sides found themselves locked in the usual stalemate, and so the fighting subsided as they signed an armistice neither side believed in then retired to their bases to resume their arms race, ready for the next provocation.

*Now settle a little. The night is fresh, and we have so much to teach each other yet.*

A great quake, indicating Eclipse was shifting in her seat; and then nothing but the background gurgle of squelching walls and the distant artillery of a heartbeat.

“Eclipse...haah...h-hey, Eclipse? Eclipse? Ahh, damn it...”

Dari lay squashed up in her own little world, with the continuous rippling of flesh on her back, up her legs, down her chest, in her face, piling her mental inbox with helpful reminders: Feel where you are. Feel where you are. Feel where you are.

She sighed.

“Well, if I’m going to spend my life getting stashed in all their damn holes,” she muttered to herself, “I guess I should, maybe, at least...t-try to get used to these ones. I don’t know why I end up in them so often, but they don’t try to digest me or make me seasick like the other places, and they do feel sort of...s-snug, I suppose, if slightly sticky. And they always smell so fresh, and clean, if a little microbial. Although...n-now that I think about it, isn’t that kind of weird considering...?”

But those considerations were forestalled when she realised that the tube that held her had come to a standstill. Before long the undulations recovered from their astonishment and got into gear again, accompanied by Eclipse’s voice, for once – unimaginably – taken aback.

No. You mean...no. Really? It really never occurred to you?

“Nngn – what didn’t?” Dari called back. She heard her voice echo up the pneumatic tube to the heavens.

*Seriously. You mean to tell me the fresh and sanitary condition of the lower intestinal tracts that have had the delight of taking you into their hospitality has never warranted of a moment of your critical scrutiny? That is to say – well, my own kind’s vestigial maze of tubes is a separate matter, of course, but – erh, how can I put this – you do know, little Dari, what rectums are generally used for, right?*

“Urk...”

*You, a prober of stories, of causes and consequences, never questioned why the most confined, most anaerobic haven of happy microfauna in the digestive system, that being your most frequented country you little explorer you, should be a place you find so little trouble to breathe? Should feel so hygienic and cosy? And it is cosy, for that matter, and safe, and warm, and you’d know it if you just calmed – down – a little – so you could appreciate it...*

“Nnnn...ahh, s-so...tight! Eclipse...nghh...p-please...”

*You make me so curious you know? Sometimes I feel this amazing engine of insights grumbling away in your cognitive backstage, taking everything in, processing everything even while your squirming and blushing draws all the spotlights. But then there might be something of tremendous consequence right in front of you, and you never see it; so you walk into mouths thinking they’re caves, or onto fingers thinking they’re logs, or onto breasts believing they’re hills, and you never question why you come out of back doors cleaner than you went in.*

Dari settled for a mope. She hankered to argue, but the historian in her waggled her finger, with a satisfaction just a little in excess of what was merited she felt,

and pointed out that each of Eclipse's points had been objectively attestable at least once, and moreover, that while the records made mention of plenty of revisionist historical movements devised from up an arse, not one of those so originated had yet achieved mainstream acceptance.

*Mmm. Well it makes you all the more cute and fun to catch, so it's all good, right? And now I'm going to tell you the reason, and it's up to you whether to believe it. Do you know how many millions of friendly little bacteria live in there? Oh, shhh...let me finish! Because they find you so cute that they labour their flagella off to give you a clean, safe nest to land in the moment they receive the signal that says you're coming in. Have you never felt them sharing their oxygen with you, so you can keep blushing and wiggling and squealing all night even though they've prepared some of the snuggest, securest spots in all the worlds just for you?*

This did not precisely square with Dari's prior assumptions about microscopic life. Then again, every interaction with Eclipse, if it was possible to divide those into discrete units after nearly a day of uninterrupted contact with her body, soaked her in the aura of someone who was not very good at being wrong. Was she joking, or being serious?

Then Dari remembered Eclipse didn't do binaries. Harvesting her data, which sounded sinister when put that way, was totally compatible for this woman-from-beyond with all the recreations that women everywhere fulfilled by feeling her inside them. Honestly she didn't know what to believe any more and opted to just lie there in overawed capitulation. If she was getting millions of conjectural housekeeping bacteria rubbed on her every pore at the moment, then let them do what they wanted: they weren't making her life any more unusual.

*Don't worry, I get it. You're so sensitive to the touch of flesh that you always end up too shy to think about it. You know that sometimes they even give you their Vitamin K? Not to venture to intrude into your life or anything, but, really, you'd think a girl who spends so much time as a snack would have herself developed a more varied diet.*

"Nnnnnaahhh!" she moaned, as the tissues around her sensed she was about to remonstrate on this point, and right on cue, clinched in to share words of dissuasion. It would therefore never be known whether her objection was to Eclipse's dietary advice, or to the idiosyncrasy of her ideas as to what counted as an intrusion in Dari's life.

*"Ohhh...gaaah.....E-Eclipse..."*

*Yes?*

*"C-Can I...nnngh....can I ask you a q-question?"*

*Always.*

"P-Please just...just tell me - WHAT do women like you get so much out of s-squeezing me in your freaking rectums?!"



Naturally the response to this was an even tighter crush, and for a few moments Dari felt as though every atom in her body had been immobilised.

*Mm, we've been through this, haven't we? Including just now.*

*"N-No...nnn...no we haven't...haah...nobody's ever t-told me..."*

*The answer, once more, is that you are Dari. One might even phrase it as follows: you squeeze, therefore you are. Heheh...okay, maybe that one was a little mischievous. Be that as it may. On that basis, the meaning contained in your question's premises makes it ample to answer itself.*

That time she felt it – *wham*. She really felt it.

She understood. If she could be considered a toy, it was not because she was only a toy in the subjective mind of whatever woman was holding her at the time, nor even in the sense that the existentialists would have meant it if they told her that she wasn't a toy in her essence, merely *being* a toy in the limited contexts in which that meaning applied. No: Dari's toy-ness was a consummate toy-ness. It was as though all the years of getting tossed down throats and jammed into holes, all that accumulated squashing and squeezing and churning, had embedded her into the universal archetype of a person who, by mere virtue of who she is, is just *supposed* to get tucked away for safekeeping in fleshy and mountainous voluptuousness. To be Dari *meant*, as a matter of first principles, to be pressed into womanly matter so deep, so tight, and with such relentless inevitability that her literal absorption into that flesh seemed only a short and natural progress to the top of that path.

She's right, isn't she, Dari sighed into the slippery mass in her face. Getting stashed into hot, wet confines like these was *what it meant to be Dari*. It had been made, by some whim of the universe that it no doubt found uproariously funny, a *fundamental characteristic of who she was*. If she ever grew famous enough to make it into a video game, the quote at the top of her character profile would be 'Mmph!'. Her character's special abilities would be called things like 'interior services', 'practical gastroenterology' or perhaps 'organic speleology' with extremely niche functions in the gameplay. And naturally, the majority of female characters and NPCs would come with special conditions which, when fulfilled, had them snatch her up for those same entertainments; hell, she was convinced there would even be an achievement to get her inside a hundred of them or something, with players thereby encouraged to go out of their way to discover and fulfil those conditions. And then they might put her in a *Smash Bros.* game, in which, whereas the Marios or Zeldas (and of course her favourite, Luigi) got cool or funny taunts to pull off after victories, no guesses were necessary as to what would happen in hers.

And in time, everyone would know. Wherever she went, any given woman who looked on her might get inexplicable cravings to massage her into whichever part of their anatomies most itched in that moment; men would cower from her lest

they be jinxed by the very sight of her and snatched up next (*well of course, thought Eclipse as she followed Dari's self-explorations, doesn't everyone know that's what they're for?*); and as for people who were neither women nor men, for this too was no true binary, well, she'd never know till it was too late, would she? To utter the name of Dari, to even think it, was to cast her flailing down another throat, into the chasm of another bust, or up those secret tunnels that made her an instant squirming delight of the most intimate nature imaginable; a gift in the hand of a playful cosmos to her captress of the hour.

At an instinctual level she'd worked this out after only the first few days of it. But hearing it put to her in plain terms like this, by the high-perspective likes of Eclipse, hit her just as deep in those of her own places in which it was her lot to end up in others – hell, even in those of an alternate version of herself, that was how absurdly far it had gone. To gain a look at Dari at that moment (needless to say, not a straightforward proposition) would have been to witness an face so crestfallen as to feel obliged to offer the poor girl a hug; which made it just as well she was well and truly off the radar, for to hear such an offer in her current position would have really, truly, absolutely made her day.

Well, at least there's no-one to see my sweltering humiliation in here, she resigned to think. And to be honest, it wasn't bringing her that crushing sense of disgrace that had dragged her so close to misery in that arduous late-early phase, as her historian's brain fumblingly denoted it: that period a few months into her transformed way of life, when that ceaseless carousel had really begun to wear down her nerves but had yet to spin her into the warmest and truest friendships – family, even – that she'd ever felt the fortune to be blessed with.

In that stiff and slippery darkness, she dwelt on how dramatic a difference those bonds had made. Oh her friends carried her along on the same carousel, no mistake about that. They took nothing from that pressure to acquiesce to an essential sense of toy-ness. And the thing about toy-ness was that it was never out of your consciousness; the perpetual motion of her muscular wrapping, the living vibrations and presses and soakings that reminded all of her body, every moment, of where she was; and even when she eventually found her way out she still felt it, like the living, ecstatically moaning ghosts of every canal or cavity she had been trapped in piling into her skin to follow wherever she went. But perhaps, when some of those tissues belonged to people who deeply cared how you felt, who kept biscuits and baths and books and beds ready for you and made you feel you *belonged*; perhaps, by the saving mercy of whatever ontological prank she was caught up in, being a toy left potential for richer meanings than most people assumed.

She felt a clench of Eclipse's prodigious masses, packing in so tight that she drew her arms in and winced. In the midst of this landslide she thought she heard a whisper in the distance: *Dari's Bargain*. Then she wondered if it had just been the wind. And then, realising what she'd just thought, she insisted to herself that

now she really was going out of her mind and gave a determined but totally inconsequential wriggle.

This goddess-succubus or whatever she was: she was listening. Listening in rapt attention through every cell in this muscly tube. Every prod, every rub, every squelchy lick was soaking up Dari's innermost thoughts and feelings and shipping them away for Eclipse's consideration.

"Well," Dari sighed, "it's not like I can do anything to stop her. It's her turn now. That's how it goes. I get it. And hey, maybe being a toy for Eclipse is not so bad. At least she seems interested in me as a person. Even if she's blatantly having her fun, she's talking to me and wants to learn about me, and has been trying to engage me in serious business even if I have no clue what she's talking about sometimes. And I guess, she is being kind of gentle..."

So Dari inveigled herself about the lady who had buried her deep inside her hindquarters, but in truth she still couldn't quite wrap her mind around how Eclipse made her feel. She found her solidity and weight of character, in more than one sense, impossible to doubt; a sincerity that seemed to press in on her, on and on and on, with the very stuff from which the stars themselves were made. She might get squashed and splashed and teased and put in embarrassing places and just possibly transfigured onto a supernatural layer of existence, but through all of it Eclipse would keep her safe. But that was the scary thing too. Her adroitness, her irrepressible sense of mischief, the unrelenting hunger of her crusade to understand and improve all things: all this, too, Dari felt press upon her skin, rub her around in the raw immensity of its power; and though any glimpse of Eclipse's personal situation was beyond her, she could taste, percolating to her lips from the innermost meat of this being, an almost bloodcurdling depth of ambition.

"Could she be planning to use what she learns from me to rebuild all the realities exactly as she wants them?" The thought gave Dari a chill, but it didn't last long in the sweat of this environment and she immediately checked herself and grumbled. "Agh, I'm hopeless. Look at you Dari, you silly, silly girl. What use could you possibly give her for something that important? And if you *were* so useful as that, well, then, she probably wouldn't have stuck you up her arse, would she? Urgh...I know that's what I'm for. I still don't get why, but I know I'm just a – mmmmmphh!!"

The space she was in glopped shut, and Dari was packed away once more in infinite flesh.

## 食

Nine hours: enough time for species to take shape then advance beyond recognition; for civilisations to rise and fall, for galaxies to swirl together then spin

themselves away; and certainly enough time for one little lady, sequestered in one of the securest spots in all of existence, to understand that she understood very little indeed. That made her instantly wiser than a great deal of sapient life across the universe, not least those poor deluded cases on a certain blue and green planet who thought they understood everything but did wrong things.

Dari was aware that something had changed out there when finally – finally! – she was squeezed back out through that sphincter-monster, thankfully dormant this time with no repeat attempt to rearrange her spacetime. But it took a further length of time – as for how long, it no longer mattered – before she was in any condition to see beyond a blur of pinks, blacks and purples.

*Welcome back to the surface, little Dari. How was your time in – mhm – the Cave of the Eclipse?*

“Too...tight...nnngh...”

Eclipse raised the hand that cupped her and gave her a poke.

“Nnn...nnnhh – h-huh?”

It was just like the last time. Something in Eclipse’s secretions had kept her refreshed, hydrated and energised just as fast as the giantess’s intestinal practices had worn her to smithereens. The stiffness, the exhaustion: had she imagined it? The blushing at least was not imaginary: there wasn’t enough magic nectar for that one in all realities combined.

*You held up well. I daresay you noticed that my posterior is somewhat more...determined, let us say, than those you are used to. And yet you stayed awake, all the way through, cute and squeaky for all my cuddles – just for me! I am most touched.*

“Th-That...that means you’re done, right?” Dari dared to force out. “You did say a thing about, um...the triangles; how when you have two points, that’s enough to work out everything else, right?”

She had already perceived the changes in her broader environment so knew the folly of the question, but found herself going through its motions in some subliminal cling to a prior state, as though the longer she held on, the further the moment when she would have to curl up in flustery recognition of the new one.

*Technically yes. I have all I need now to work out a perfect understanding of you.*

“There’s a but, isn’t there...”

*How do you surmise that?*

“Um...” She had rehearsed her answer furiously to herself since she realised, but still got landed on by an anvil of timidity at the crucial moment. “Um, b-because it looks like we’re on some kind of huge bed, and...ahh, really, really huge, with huge curtains and stuff, and...nnngh...y-you’ve taken off your trousers...”

Eclipse gave an adoring squeal – an actual squeal – and cuddled Dari ballistically into her cheek.

“Nnnnnnngh!!”

*Oh, little Dari. I apologise. You are irresistible.*

Sure, she thought, falling face-first into Eclipse's palm. Of all things, apologise for that.

*Mm. Perhaps it's best for both of us if you never disclose what just happened.*

She sat up, then turned away in Eclipse's hand with arms crossed and face still flushing like the flag of the Soviet Union as she caught a tiny glint of potential *kompromat*.

"Well..." she said slowly. "I could put it in a book one day. You know, if I ever get round to doing more with all my notes. How about... 'Chapter One: The Time I Heard Eclipse Squeal'?"

She gave a start as the great hand shifted round her, then broke into struggles as she was pinched between thumb and forefinger, then outright yelped as she found herself suspended over a bottomless chasm. It was startling in the extreme to be this close, watching – smelling! – those hot pink slopes lift and lower with planetary heft as they washed her in their overpowering warmth...

The gorge in between went all the way down. She knew it could smell her too. It wanted her. Wanted her in there.

*Might I advise a reconsideration of that chapter title? I'm just not sure the word 'Time' befits it, you see. I have heard there are places here and there where, compressed tight enough, Time slows right to the verge of a halt. Getting out of those zones can take so much effort that for cuties like you it must surely feel like millennia.*

"Aaahh! Okay! Okay! I won't write it! I won't write it! Eeep!"

The hand moved Dari so close to Eclipse's chest that it would surely rear up and glomp her. The fingers jiggled her in place.

*Don't misinterpret. You are well within your rights to write your truth. That's one of the two universal Ways when it comes to writing, and of course you know the other: that manuscripts don't burn. I wouldn't dream of trying to stop you. All I'm doing is making a courteous request between friends. You are totally free to decline it, and there shall be no hard feelings between us if you do.*

She chuckled, transmitting a quake through the awesome cliffs that consumed Dari's field of view.

"H-Help! What d-do you want me to do? Do I write it or not? Nnnngh...so huge..."

Eclipse's fingers snapped shut, whisking Dari to safety. They opened for her to find herself back at what seemed the standard distance in Eclipse's conversational conventions, although that living, breathing lair still rumbled at her through the distant window of that suit.

"S-Silly Dari..." she chastised herself, fumbling around for her composure. "Just look at her! W-What the heck were you trying to pull there? Nnngh, so huge...looked so heavy..."

*In any event, you were correct.*

Dari looked at her confused.

*In your observation that this is my bed – well, one of them at least – and your other observation that I have, in fact, removed my trousers.*

Dari risked a peer over the precipice of Eclipse's hand and immediately wished she hadn't. Down through the cloudless sky stretched further colossal structures whose grandeur would not be done justice to if she merely observed that Eclipse was sitting cross-legged with nothing on beneath her waist. Her tail slid back and forth on the sheets with an idle flip now and then, like a legendary pink sea serpent guarding the secret of some submerged ancient temple. The truth was confirmed.

Dari gulped.

*As I was saying, I could see you off now and my study of you would be none the worse for it. However, why should we not take the opportunity to go through with the third and final stage of investigation? It would fill what gaps remain a lot faster, and in a manner considerably more pleasurable to the both of us. And you know, I might just have a little something for you when we're done.*

Dari's long-suffering internal voice of alarm didn't make the effort to stop her this time. She'd take the bait. Why even bother?

*"U-Um...and what is the third stage? What gaps are you still trying to fill?"*

A finger pressed Dari down in that palm so that her face, protruding over the thumb, was oriented exactly so that if a straight line was drawn along her current line of sight, it would run through Eclipse's crotch.

*The best ones.*

*"I should have k-known..."*

*Well, you did know it's a triangulation. Does it not follow?*

Dari braced herself. On the occasional instances where she learnt in advance exactly what was going to happen to her, she would use the intervening time to mentally picture herself in the environments concerned to try and prime her body for the impending sensations. It never did any good though. Just as no plan survives contact with reality, all these preparations burst in a cloud of bunnying adrenaline the moment she was put on an impact trajectory.

*As you well know, there are some knowledges that cannot be spoken, written or dreamed. They must be felt: known in the purest sense of all. I speak, in this case, of those heights of sensation that occupy the wildest range of –"*

*"You're going to have sex with me, aren't you? Eep...w-why not just say it?"*

*Because it is a serious matter, my little Dari, and one which you of all people should comprehend. You cannot have forgotten the abject fai-...I mean, the difficulties the people of your world of origin have created for themselves in coming to terms with such a meaningful part of their nature?*

But Dari was off in a world of her own: "She's going to put me in there...she's going to put me in there...nnnnghhh!"

A great pink pinch to all of her body shivered her out of her stupor.

I would like you to pay attention for a moment, my triple dumpling, because for you this is a matter of tremendous consequence.

“Aahh...w-what do you mean?” Dari couldn’t decide which was more worrying: when Eclipse spoke in her in-you-go frolicsome succubus tone, as blatantly horny as she was nonetheless scrupulous in her work; or times like this, when she seemed to address her with the gravity of the most supreme consciousnesses in existence, admonishing the little explorer that one careless little scurry could land her bum on the button that blows up all things.

I do not wish to cast your memories back to a reality in which you no longer identify, not for longer than absolutely necessary. But recall for me, briefly: is it not the case, that your old world at times dealt you great unhappinesses on account of a disapproval of your truth; say, that you are a woman for whom certain sensations arise in response to other women? Or indeed – and you’ll forgive me for hesitating before the quite magnificent irony of this one – that at your original scale, they believed you too tall?

“I – w-well, that was a long time ago...”

Precisely. You have made my point for me. Is it not the case, that the essential character of your journey since then has not only given the lie to your old world’s habits of sexual misbelief, but demolished the entire frames through which sex is considered there?

“D-Demolished...eep...”

Eclipse spread out her wings then rested them half-folded on either side, enclosing her and her guest like a tent and reducing the light to a murky fuchsia haze. Dari scampered back with a yelp as that great face leant in close.

I mean to say, little Dari, that what I have observed of your old world when it comes to erotic aspects of being, challenges the imperatives of love across the realities to such a brazen degree that it constitutes perhaps my single greatest concern about the potential of that world to compromise a love-based cosmic community. I do not mind sharing this with you because if you ever have cause to encounter it, or encounter any other world where similar corruptions prevail, you must be prepared for the conflicts that follow.

“W-Wait a minute, Eclipse...conflicts – what do you mean? I d-don’t...”

Conflicts, because the glorious carnality of your arc will have made you incredulous, as it should, and as am I, at how any love-capable life could hold to mis-realities such as that love is to only exist between certain types of people, arranged in certain ways. Such as that millions, billions of unique individuals could be divided into a handful of groups, even a simple absolute dyad, structured to rules that each set must be entirely the same within and entirely at odds without, and cast against each other in an existential struggle for power. Such as that the deepest wells of sensual joy are to be feared, suspected and excluded from respectable spaces, or worse, slandered with attributions of immorality, vulgarity and filth, or worse still,

that is, worse to the ultimate extent, weaponised as a means to the most gratuitous cruelty. Such as even that most impossible and universally poisonous error which cuts across the entire sorry landscape of this wasteland: the belief, and do not ask me where it came from, that all women should be small. And by that I do not mean small in the way that you are small, Dari, but in ways which you, fear not, are every bit as immense as she in whose hand you presently and needlessly cower.

“B-But you’ve been calling me little all night...you kept me in your...”

You are little, Dari, yes. But you are also immense.

“Now that d-doesn’t even make sense!”

Then consider it this way. While the women of your old world are taught to hide the small in the large, you, Dari, hide the worlds in the worlds. In doing so all the promises of magnitude latent in your form are fulfilled. As for the outstanding contradictions posed thereto by the imagery of your physical experience, well, that is one of the things about you – the many things – that fills me with fascination.

Eclipse unfolded her wings and relaxed, leaving the beleaguered creature in her palm to wonder what in the ten thousand worlds she had just been put through. A petrifying thought struck her: that for all the places on women’s bodies to which she’d been fed, she had never in fact been eaten by a brain. For the first time she felt this was now a valid apprehension.

Well, you get the gist, correct? That is the extent of the single raindrop I wished to let soak into your consciousness for now. Look after it, won’t you?

“Nnnnnn...”

If nothing else, remember this: that though your core will protect your body, it offers nothing for injuries to the soul. Those are ninety-nine times more dangerous, and you must armour yourself against them should your journey take you to the more degraded realities.

Seeing that Dari still stared astonished at her, Eclipse sighed and said:

Look. Imagine someone who cannot bear the things you bear – I mean, who genuinely, categorically hates it, who is broken by it, who receives not a shred of gratification from any aspect of it in any manner whatsoever; imagine them put through it. Imagine a world where millions are put through such things as a matter of routine. Would a core like yours be such a blessing to those people? Your journey, Dari, has plunged you into broader and deeper wells of carnal delight than you ever imagined, and at times these have terrified you. But they have also spared you the true terror that is finding the wells poisoned with lies, their walls mispurposed to trap – truly trap – and their joy-giving waters abused to drown.

She placed the fingers of her free hand round Dari’s shoulders and gave her a considerate clasp, absorbing her shudder before it began.

And that is one reason your contribution tonight has been so helpful. The poison shall be cleansed. Love shall be restored to all the realms where it has fallen. To that



*end, do you now understand the importance of those things where words fall short and instead it is necessary to feel?*

Dari was too shaken to notice the surge in mischief that now blazed in the fires of Eclipse's eyes; the way her tongue danced on her lips, her wings drew taut, and her body flexed in anticipation.

"Yeah...I suppose..." she answered, as she supposed she had to.

*Good. Then get in.*

"Wha - aaaaah!"

The ambush was sprung. The dazed Dari, befuddled out of her timorousness in the shadow of women's intimate parts by Eclipse's rhetorical storm clouds, was taken completely unawares by the thunderclap she had forgotten was coming: the clasp of the fist up to her chest to soar her down, down, down to where eternal ridges of rippling leg enclosed her horizons, and then, too soon, a heaving, jiggling deep-pink maw...

With a *squelch!* Dari felt herself plastered into a swamp of flesh as slippery, chaotic and raw as must have spawned out of primordial turbulence, the first organic material to ever materialise. She did not, of course, make a dispassionate analysis of her situation, nor necessarily contemplate it in the sober attitudes of the ancient philosophers; mainly because her skin was too busy with its demands that she squirm like she had never squirmed in her life (except every day) as the onslaught of heady miasmas, rubbery frictions and overpowering warmth pressed their claim upon her.

*Oohh...mmmmhh, yes! There, there we are at last...oh, you treat - relax! Come on, you're not even in yet!*

Dari cognised, from subconscious physical memory if nothing else, that she was being pressed to the outer gates of Eclipse's inferno. They pulsated beneath the impression of her body, as though weighing up the balance of her life's virtues and sins prior to admission so as to decide which of the hundred and eight levels of treatment they were required by justice to slurp her away to. As she wriggled on their scrutinising scales, two fingers pressed on her back with the effect of sliding her higher up those gates, till her head, then shoulders, disappeared with an "Mmmph!" into a hood of flesh that overhung the crown of this fearsome structure. A bulbous presence awaited in its darkness, and Dari let loose a silent squeal as she felt it somehow slide open to latch on to her face, pulling her up as those monstrous fingers assisted from below. Everything shook like a quake at the end of the world, with a thunder of moans by way of added sound effects, as the judge at the gates massaged unto Dari her verdict.

As Dari's face, breasts and shoulders faced their reckoning with the magisterial clitoris, the rest of her body found itself perturbed by gurgling echoes from deep in the primary ingress below. Her fate had been decided, and because Eclipse was a compassionate and love-based reality, it was a judgement that did not make as its priority the adherence to general principles of crime and punishment for their

own sake, still less the indulgence of prejudices about their defendant based on gender, ethnicity or social class. Rather they adjudicated entirely on her specific circumstances as an individual: which regrettably, there was no avoiding it, and she knew this, meant a custodial sentence of nine hours, without parole, in the deepest, darkest, wettest, most unremittingly stimulating enfoldments available in the carnal Eclipsean nation.

Dari let loose the customary wail as the labial folds awakened. Though it might have better befitted mythic tradition if they had yawned open, the fact, which must be acknowledged in the interests of historical integrity, was that they rose only slowly to enclose her legs in their outer envelope. As they pulled, her upper body was cast from the clitoral dock as the great apparatus rotated her whole, and it was then the soles of her feet made a first brush against the mouth of the other world – but then immediately it could only be felt with the tiny kicks her constriction afforded her, for now the door had opened to admit her. She emitted a high-pitched squeal as she felt her legs drawn into the tunnel, then her waist, and soon everything up to her chest felt the rub of more folds, then more, grasping her like arms from a realm made entirely of fleshly chaos, dragging her down through its primal hole in the fabric of reality.

Dari pressed her arms into the lake of flesh, finding little purchase upon its shifting slippery masses but nonetheless pressing with all her strength to resist its awesome pull. She could feel the unseen muscles of Eclipse’s interior all around her, wrestling her in, dragging her inch by inch, then slowing, letting her shift out just a touch, in order that her body might fall for the hope that she had any chance whatever of forestalling the reckoning to come.

A shadow fell over her as that giant hand returned, its fingers descending on either side of her new nest. She gaped up and saw the mammoth tip of its middle finger just as it came to rest atop her head. It tousled her hair a little, then held there, applying just short of the weight required to commit her to the depths.

“Nnnnnngh! Eclipse!! W-Wait! Let me –”

The finger pressed down.

SQUELCH.

“Mmmmpphhh!!”

...and the maw relaxed, and its folds fell closed, one set over another, sealing the gates with a strength beyond the remit of mortal hands.

## 食

Clasping her hand upon her sealed path to the underworld and rubbing, Eclipse let loose cries of sensual triumph that would have broken the musical notation systems of most civilisations. This was her favourite part of the process, and she had waited patiently, resisting the temptation to skip ahead. Now for the reward.

*Oohh...ohh, by the...mmm, get in, Dari...all the way in...*

She clenched her muscles, indeed directing them to drag their wiggling captive to the very depths of her paradise. That was where the dance of order and chaos had decided she belonged, and Eclipse knew that it was good. She could feel her, a tiny wiggling shape embedded in the most sensitive of all her flesh; feel her little limbs pushing, massage the contours of her tiny face; could even drink in that squirrely helplessness as she ramped it to its highest possible setting. To squish her around, squeeze her like a little sponge, feeling her emotions soak into the walls, this tiny self-contradicting bundle of submissive acceptance and squirming resistance, of awe and agitation scattered with the sweet spice of pleasure; the sense of power as it was meant to be, of a connection as consummate as it was creative, was utterly intoxicating.

*To see...ahh...that it is good....ahhh...is not enough. You have to...ohhh...feel that it is good, too...ohhh, it's good alright...*

Her hands found the seam of her elaborate jacket. She loosened it, then shook it off, cloak and all, that she might better condense her sensory experience to undistracted communion.

To mediocre eyes Eclipse's indulgence in the thrills of this exercise might have compromised any pretence that she was still engaged in her work. There was a fair point, granted, that in this third and final phase she eschewed systematic reflection in favour of moans that rang a thousand bells across her universe, as well as exhilarated utterances that some peoples might have recognised from passages of their various scriptures as inspired by these echoes millennia ago. But that she had abandoned serious purpose could not be further from the truth. What her innermost folds and creases learnt by working back and forth on their little plaything was as instructive to Eclipse as anything whose measure she had taken at the other two points of the triangle. The difference was simply that the knowledge extracted this time was suited for expression in more flexible formats than those demanded by, say, the epistemological tyrants in human academia.

In Eclipse's view, all formats were to be treated on a strictly meritocratic basis.

*Ohh, Dari, I shall press you down...mmmmmmmm!...with the weight of unhewn wood...ohhh! Together like this...free from desire...*

In fact, anyone attempting to present Eclipse as a shameless sex freak would have been doing her a most insensitive disservice, rather than merely putting themselves at risk of a remedial tour through some challenging natural formations. Eclipse had so committed her will to the understanding and improvement of all universes at the grandest scale, that she simply lacked the leisure to engage in such things as a matter of recreation alone. The only chances she really got were in the context of healing exercises or systematic investigations like these, and even then, only with individuals who fulfilled either of two conditions. Either they had to expressly consent to it, for if they did not – which was often, as not everyone had the stamina or the nerve – she knew the underlying will of all-that-

exists required that she honour their wishes. Or, more rarely, they had to be exceptional individuals like Dari: bound by that same underlying will which in this case required they *should* be put through it, while also satisfying Eclipse that they were of a psychology to 'hide the worlds in the worlds': in other words, that they could take it, at some level knew they needed it, and in spite of all the squirming and squeaking would not be fundamentally the worse for it afterwards.

*Mmmhh...mmmmmmhh! Ohh, Dari, Dari, you know not what you do!...*

Eclipse writhed and moaned in the highest coruscations of joy that all the realities had ever combined to make possible in a singular existence. She bit her lip, manipulating her vaginal walls to grab at the tiny woman within them. Dari kept rolling off their slippery tissue or disappearing between their folds, but after a few attempts she managed to grab her around the midsection, and, focusing her concentration, proceeded to drive her back and forth within the canal, feeling her movements as a bomb of pleasure trembling again and again to the furthest peripheries of her body. And then, with a wail of unutterable beauty, such sublime things happened in that chamber that it would be a sacrilege upon beauty itself to attempt to reduce them to words.

By the time these events subsided to an intelligible state, Eclipse lay heaving on the soft down of her bed, the colours of her body returning to within the visual range, her breaths slowing till once more they no longer needed weather forecasts to interpret them.

She became conscious of a sudden spike of fluster-wriggles in the little one, whose environment was undergoing some changes.

*Mmm...yes, they do that, she reassured her. I'm afraid you'll have to stay like that till they settle. But they can go on tasting and telling me about you, so that's okay.*

She grinned. In fact, and it was okay to keep this from her companion for just a little longer, any new information was surplus to her purposes. She knew everything now. Everything there was to know about the little wanderer she had admitted to her innermost sanctuary. Soon, she understood everything too; and after a little while longer, she had understood all the likeliest implications down six links of every chain of probability. Her smile was the smile of a universe the way it was meant to be.

*Well, that's alright then. I have reached my decision.*

She shut her eyes, concentrating once more.

Something happened.

*There...that should do it. Euh, I'd better let her stay the full session anyway. She feels so good wiggling around in there, and after all, I did tell her I would. I am Eclipse, and shall be ethical in the use of my power.*

“Mmmphh! Eeeeeeee, eeee-mmffffhh!!”

In what might have been an enclosed dimension with its own physical variables, Dari lost track of all sense of time, direction, or indeed of any reality that might conceivably have existed beyond the chaos-churn of flesh which now rubbed its catch into infinity.

Its work had started slow, systematic, folding and wrapping around her as though it had a life of its own, once, twice, multiple times. It was supple, soft, yet insurmountably strong, and she squirmed in its mercy as it carried out its survey of her every surface. In finer areas such as between her fingers and around her nipples, it pressed in tight to fill all the space that it could, within and around, and meanwhile slathered her with juices that soaked elemental ecstasies into her skin. This was because the readings they produced were helpful to its assessment.

In short order it completed this task of charting out a three-dimensional maximum-resolution erogenous Dari-map. Then it set about the application of this data. Its excitement was palpable, because over the aeons it had cultivated a taste for particular characteristics, and Dari fulfilled two of its favourite conditions: a psychological aptness for being handled; and an erotic centre of gravity not overly centralised in one region, but sufficiently distributed to be most easily aroused by working upon the entire body at once.

Being handled now monopolised Dari’s consciousness. She could see nothing, but it was clear from the absolute touch that Eclipse’s vagina was filled with more folds, bulges, rumples, crevices and muscular projections than any space that size had a right to contain, and that moreover they so overlapped and shifted to get at her that they surely could not have been adhering to the proper codes of conduct for three-dimensional space. And they got her. How they got her. Finding a residual tinge of arousal in their catch after nine hours in one tactile incubation and nine hours in another, it took mere seconds of rubbing, squashing, rolling, tickling, pressing, sliding and carrying back and forth to reactivate that craving and massage it through ninety-nine roofs to the wailing brink of climax. And yet, and yet; the wave never broke. Because by then these currents had conveyed her out to the open seas of lust on a planet with no continents at all, and now it was their task, and their bliss, to whisk her along the top of the wave, soaring, fluctuating right on the edge of its white-hot threshold but never – at least not yet – allowed to fall off it.

Thus was Dari taken to a place where she experienced things beyond the reach of language; where she felt sensations only otherwise accessible in that point in which all matter and energy existed before the first of all universes was born; where her voice was stirred to accomplishments no written alphabet will ever grow fit to render, but theoretically would best be captured in logographic scripts like Chinese – though the appropriate character would need no fewer than one hundred and eight strokes, and each would move when a new one was added.

So it went for as long as Eclipse drove towards her own exultation at the pinnacle. For that entire time, if time remains the correct word, Dari was locked in that state where her entire sensory existence was wrapped into a line tracing the razor-edge of sexual apogee. Nor did that self-contained world remain stationary. It bounced, then jerked, then shook with the ever-increasing force of a passion so fierce and strong that the sheer energy of its motion might have detached it from the bolts of existence altogether; and then, and then, a colossal detonation so impossibly loud that the sole member of this reality's population experienced it as silence before the dams burst as had always been their purpose, and the girl was swept up in a tide of something miraculous which washed her far, far, far away, all the way back to the merely ordinary world of a tiny person sealed in a gigantic vagina.

"Haaaaaaaaa..."

She lay in that bed of slippery tissue, panting, shuddering in twitchy spasms, lifted and lowered, coated in a stickiness that overflowed into her nostrils, her lips; it tasted of a caramelly sweetness yet was dashed with streaks of savoury steel. Spinning within herself like a compass between poles of relief and frustration, she felt her body retreating from the precipice; had come so close, as close as was mathematically allowed, been fixed there in a provisional eternity – but at the very last instant before eternity's end, been dropped back in gravity's pocket and returned the other way.

"H...h...h-how...w-why...urrrrrrrrghh..."

Rolling back into the shallows of arousal, she had scarcely plopped into them when she found the incomprehensible genitalia had surprises in store for her yet. The spongy marsh beneath her began to rumble...

"Wha...what's h-happening now..."

...then all of a sudden, it swelled! Its surfaced evened out till all the folds and protrusions vanished, carrying her up as on an burgeoning meaty balloon till it compacted her straight into the opposite wall, swollen in identical manner, to leave her sandwiched there spread-eagled in muscular smoothness.

"Nnnnnnaaaa – mmmfffff!"

With a struggle, she managed to tilt her squashed face sideways just enough to liberate her lips from the press.

"Eclpsssss! Whtt – hlpp! Wwyyy..."

And for the first time, the walls vibrated back at her in Eclipse's voice.

*Mmm...yes, they do that. I'm afraid you'll have to stay like that till they settle. But they can go on tasting and telling me about you, so that's okay.*

Which was not as helpful an intervention as it might have been, Dari couldn't help thinking.

"Nnngh...she's gotta be...joking..."

But Eclipse wasn't one to joke, she remembered. Or rather, she did, only her jokes were also true.

She sighed in her heart, slid her face back into resting position, and as usual, without having to think about it, 'hid the world in the world'.

"Nnnnph..."

## 食

Dari's first full-body immersion in a secret entrance had come within days of her shrinking. As the stars would have it it hadn't even been an explicitly erotic engagement, merely the prank of a particularly lewd individual who had decided to hide her away there for 'safekeeping'. Since that day she had occasionally found herself pumped in and out of these caves or straightforwardly fed to them, and the effect on her was distinct. Dari in the passion furnace was a helpless mouse at the mercy not only of her external environment but also that part of her internal one over which, like the majority of people, her mind's sovereignty found itself theoretical. Those were the parts that had most to say when she found herself squished endlessly within wet and fluctuating contours far beyond those of the higher venues she was accustomed to, but also immense pulsating tightnesses in excess of the lower. All that was left her, in those circumstances, was to squeal and squirm in a carnal whirlpool of the rawest impulses of all, sucking her away into a realm where all her terror, rapture, timidity and stifled lust were spun to their farthest extremes then crushed together as one.

Needless to say, a few experiences like that and all her old world's baggage of suppositions about sexuality had become psychologically untenable, unserviceable in all realities beyond the one she had left for good. Hard framings of friendships and loving relationships with a fortified border to partition them; the scripts and rituals of flirting and dating; prescribed family structures; even assumptions like what parts of you counted as sexual organs, or who was supposed to put what where: all such notions as had been the cast-iron girders holding up the skies of, say, her erstwhile student colleagues or history textbooks or TV shows, had been too uselessly cumbersome to fit through the rifts with her. They were her lost luggage, tattered emptied suitcases sucked to the depths of these whirlpools, churned till they broke apart into their elemental particles of arbitrary meaninglessness then spat crashing through the windows of the sky, never to return. For Dari 'picking up' implied something completely different now. Friendship could not be lower on a hierarchy to anything when it was experienced in g-forces at three hundred and sixty degrees. And old-world notions of settling down to spam out kids in the context of a walled-off monogamous nuclear family, never exactly persuasive, were about as meaningful now as the notion of transforming into a durian.

Brr, shivered Dari, despite the temperature of her confines. Some memories had spikes to help them stick. You wouldn't swallow durians. You don't even eat durians. You scatter them in harbours to sink ships.

Was this a freedom of sorts? She wondered about this while pinned in the shape of a star by Eclipse's swollen vaginal walls.

Squelched back to her immediate situation, Dari's scampering train of thought stumbled over the question of whether getting bodily inserted like this constituted sexual intercourse. The answer could be yes if one took as relevant the rumbling moans that communicated quite clearly the nature of Eclipse's satisfactions, as well as the fact, embarrassing as it felt, that threading through her own raw tempest of feelings right now was a fibre of unaccountable horniness that meant this counted, at least that far, as a salubrious erotic exchange between two parties. Any doubts on that matter certainly did not apply to those times she had clambered into her friends' places for this overt purpose. But the answer could just as easily be no, because she'd also been schlopped away on alternative intents which, to give them the benefit of the doubt for argument's sake, included 'safekeeping', 'punishment', 'so you won't need a ticket', and 'I lost it, be a useful tiny and get it out for me'; as little as these altered the experience on her end.

So maybe this was no longer a yes-or-no matter. Or, as Eclipse might say, you could only resolve it by elevating the conversation to a higher level of analysis which obliterated the very assumptions from which it came.

"Urgh...fuck. I'm even starting to think like her now..."

The storm whipped up in the ground zero of Eclipse's orgasm had yet to subside within her. Annoyingly, she had to admit the firm continuous squash of her surroundings was helping; what had previously took her libidinous handles and spun them up as far as they could go was now steadily winding them down, relaxing her muscles and sustaining her in a holding pattern of low-key arousal. The sensation dissipated her concentration, so instead of following a train of thought her mind tumbled randomly from one meaningful image to the next. The faces of her closest companions loomed large: a flash of full and flowing blue hair here, a hearty laugh behind freckles in the shape of the Summer Triangle there, then a heartwarming shuffle of furry feline ears; and she was happy to let them, although her listing confines had a habit of knocking the picture away from strictly their faces. Flickers broke through from her life before it all started too, perhaps through the cracks Eclipse had prised open; she began picking up on other things she had thought, uttered or dreamed that had seemed innocuous at the time but now made her wonder if they had been sentient snippets of rope, attempting to jiggle themselves into a cordon to coax her path in its present direction. Alas, amidst those fragments the durians barged back in too, and to make matters worse one of them segued into the grinning visage of Lee Kuan Yew; not a set of memories she had any interest in permitting association with her current



environment, and so she pressed her face into the wall of Eclipse's sanctum as hard as she could till her mind submerged in clouds of gentle intoxication.

It was in that reverie that she became conscious of a new sensation. Still no less squeezed by the swell of Eclipse's vaginal walls, she felt her feet lapped over by some strange liquid; or was it a plasma? She felt muddled by its touch, as though it was a new state of matter whose like she had never known before. She felt it take hold of her shins, then tickle under her knees; and she worked out that it was pumping in from beneath the plane of her body – from the direction of whatever Eclipse had where reasonable people usually have a womb. And now it was spreading up her chest, tingling her nipples, her neck, feeling its way up her arms. What was this material? In one instance it had the sweetness of a big wet kiss, in the next the exhilaration of a night sky alive with stars and galaxies; then it was the ashen heat of a belching volcano, and then the energising spark of enlightenment at the moment of a new discovery, a fleeting sense that in that filament of time alone, she knew all things. And then she gave up trying to work out what it was and just accepted it: felt it foam all around her now, dance on her face, drift into her nostrils, stick in her long-soaked hair; because frankly this was a day when attempting to make sense of anything with the usual rulebook, even that of a life as unstrapped from the rules as hers, was totally pointless.

## 食

Dari.

“Mnnnngh...”

*A giggle. I know you're in there.*

Dari opened her eyes. In itself this accomplished nothing, there was nothing to see in this place-behind-the-beginning, but it at least supplied a tiny kick to get her consciousness in gear. She hadn't been asleep, rather mooching on autopilot through the scents and squeezes in this sea of squidgy pulsation.

She found she could move a little again. The walls had contracted back to their resting condition, whereupon they'd considerably desisted from their earlier frenzy and contented themselves with soft and gentle background squashing.

*How does it feel?*

“Nnngh...Eclipse...”

*No need to put it into words, just...feel. Ohh, that's good. That's very good. Bit of a bumpy ride, mhmm?*

“Nnnn, I f-feel like a...a...nngh, I d-don't even know...”

*Like a Dari.*

*Squish.*

“Nnnngpphh! Nnt agnnn!”

*Mmm, don't worry, I'm just teasing. Ohh, still so good...*

Dari sputtered as the walls eased up: the one on top lifting away about as far as the tip of her nose, the one beneath receiving her back in its creases.

“H-How...how much longer...”

*Not long now, little Dari. Not long. You’ve been wonderful. I want you to know that you have made me extremely happy today.*

Great, that’s one more then, Dari thought sullenly. And a goddess or goddess-level being, too: meaning, one more who can probably reach me anywhere and who’s going to come back for more.

*Now indulge my delight in you one more time. I –*

“Nnngh! N-No, not again, please! Oh m-my g-”

*Shhhh.*

The ceiling and all of outer space beyond it fell in again, albeit gently.

*I don’t mean like that. I want to ask you something.*

Dari gave a foreboding moan. She felt little confidence that she could survive a trip in that direction either.

*First consider your circumstances.*

This struck her as an odd instruction, given that the circumstances in question left her little capable of considering anything else. But as the flesh pressed down and the fluids squelched in her ears, they drove her awareness deeper, down through the layers of immediate discomfiture, down through experiences with which comparisons could be drawn, till they compressed her as far as she could go: right up against that quintessential archetype of Dari-ness, in accordance with which to exist, by virtue of itself, was to be awed into bashful helplessness by gigantic women who were *just supposed* to secure her away as tight as she could go. She would squeak, she would squirm, she couldn’t help it, but its only effect was to excite those who encased her – in their entire beings, and in the individual organs situationally concerned – to draw her deeper, tighter, smaller and smaller, as they revelled in fulfilment of the cosmic drive to make her feel herself to be part of them.

*Good. Very good. You’re getting there quickly now, you see?*

“Nnnngah...”

*So. What does that tell you about your power?*

Power? This time she just gave up.

“I k-know, I don’t have any! Nnngh...I g-get it, okay?”

*Wrong answer.*

“Huh? Nnnnggphhh!”

A booming *glop!* as her whole world was glomped as though into a single point. The vaginal folds squeezed her as tight as their compositions allowed.

*I know you can do better than that. I mean, okay, I shall grant you that at one level your answer is beyond dispute. But you know this already, so why do you presume I*

would squander my energy to rub – it – in? And here her folds indeed rubbed Dari real tight in opposite directions: once, twice, three times.

“Mmph mmf mmmfff – ahh!” Dari gasped for breath, forced to gulp down another helping of Eclipse Juice that had made it into her mouth. “Nnngn...p-please...I don’t unders-stand...w-what you want me...nngn...t-to say...”

The folds released her, but everything rocked as a sigh swept through Eclipse’s body.

*Alright. Understood. I’ll provide you with the answer. Just this once. I suppose you are not presently in the most cerebral of environments after all.*

Dari felt the great succubus sit up, cross her legs, then place her palms on her hips and press in so that everything she knew contracted once more: not so tight as to disorient her this time, but tight enough to hold her undivided attention.

*You, little Dari, are as powerful a little friend as I have ever had the pleasure to hold.*

“Is that some kind of joke?” Dari would have fired back, if not precluded in her effort by a fleshy faceful.

*Do you understand why?*

This is about my core again, she thought. Or – oh no. Please no. Not that. I don’t want to hear more about the unfair things I’ve been through, the strength I must have to have got this far, how inspiring and *brave* and *resilient* I am *for someone so small*. Please don’t keep me squished in here for that. Please. After spending so much time massaging your big cosmic goddess-y magic specialness into me, you wouldn’t now go so low; would you?

*You shall hear nothing of that sort from me*, Eclipse’s voice reassured her, and the folds around Dari massaged her tight with special emphasis on the top of her head, as though making a little fun of her for thinking incorrectly. *But, do you really not see it? Not feel it?*

“Mmff, cmmm nn! Jsff tlll mn!”

*Precisely because a girl like I, if you’ll tolerate a person of my eras to so pronounce myself – precisely because I can stick you in wherever I like and feel so incredible at having you there...mmm! Is that not a power on your part, little Dari? I mean, no matter how tiny you are, no matter how defenceless within the fancies of my flesh, is it not these very qualities that enable you to awaken not only in beings countless times larger than yourself but even in I, a being whose power and sphere of concern approaches the maximum – not to spread out my own wings or anything, but it’s a matter of objective pertinence here – to awaken even in I, such sensations of the most wholesome, energising, most unrelenting joy? No, more than that – her vagina was squeezing Dari excitedly now – not merely joy, but Connection, a Connection specific to you and I in the togetherness of cosmic personhood! My adorable little friend, do you not see?*

The words reverberated around her with such rumbling gravitas that Dari found herself committing all the concentration she yet could muster, although it wasn't easy so packed in heat and meat and moisture. Well, connection is one way to put it, she thought in the still-operational corner of her higher brain as the rest of her shuddered in her wobbling detention.

*See, there! Like that! The slightest twitch, the faintest whimper, the meekest instance of motion possible, the minutest rearrangement of matter you could imagine: ohh, if only you could feel what it does to me, the electric thrill it sends coursing to the peaks of my horns, along the ridges of my wings, down to the tip of my tail! You – move – mountains – Dari; do – you – not – see? Need I get some capacitors out to tap the overwhelming torrents of energy your wiggling converts within me, then take you to see your handiwork light up a small city?*

*“Mmmphhh! Cnnpffsstsss...”*

*You matter Dari, that's what I seek to communicate to you. You matter. There is no insignificance whatsoever in the position that has fallen to you. You are a limitless, ever-giving gift of the most phenomenal, exhilarating, supremely empowering delights to any woman who reality deems worthy to get her hands on you. To feel you within her, squirming perfect in the soft mould of her desires, is to feel that her reality is a good place, a wonderful place, a place becoming of the love from which all realities were generated. To feel it, feel your every little struggle, is to be healed of doubts or wounds to one's capacity to believe it. You push, you kick, and I'm sure it feels pointless if you measure its point by its power to make you less of a toy, but ooh, believe me, there are other ways to measure it, and the more I measure it, the greater the heights to which I wish to do so! And it is there, somewhere in there – I haven't quite worked out exactly where, but I know it to be true – that rests the significance of the way that every new friend (she hummed happily at her choice of word) who takes you into her absorbs something essential of you, in order that she might ever feel that joyous power; and in the same exchange, leaves something of her in you as well, be that in your revitalised biomass or in just one more place in the community of realities for you to belong. With your closest companions that should be obvious to you, but be in no doubt, that not one of those who have had their way with you, not one, however nonchalant some of those more predacious ladies might have behaved with you – not one has ever forgotten the adorable flavour of love that today, here in my cosy lair in this space between realities, you have shared with me too. You matter, my little Dari, wanderer of ten thousand worlds. You matter. You know it. And don't you forget it.*

The tunnel relented and loosened its folds, plopping the dazed and more than a little bewildered Dari into its floor. She lay sprawled for a while, breathing heavy as the sticky surface lifted and lowered her on Eclipse's breaths. The cavern's rhythmic heave seemed expectant for an answer.

*“Urgh...”*

But Dari was speechless. Of all the treatments she had received across her unrivalled catalogue of internal confinements, even within the most eccentric and terrifying goddesses she had known, she could not recall any of them fastening her into her most private place in order to subject her to a speech like that.

Just look at you you silly, silly thing, she told herself. You've really gone and done it this time. You've got in way, way, way over your head.

"But, I d-don't choose..." she managed at last. "I mean, I never get any say in – hnnnpff!"

And now Eclipse's fearsome index finger had thrust its way into the tunnel, filling the space in an instant and cramming Dari against the squishy floor with its tip. It let in slits of light that lit up the reds and pinks of the surrounding flesh as without hesitation it proceeded to rub its tiny catch into those pliable ranges.

*Stars alive, do you really need me to spell it out for you?! Nnngh, I suppose there's no helping it with you, is there? You, yes you, little Dari, have all the say that you need to cast wave after wave of exhilaration across the universes: to pave the path before you with your truth, to banish infallible corruptions, to reinvigorate all worlds whose love has fallen to distress! Ooh, do you really not get it, you stubborn little thing, with these stubborn little limbs, and this stubborn little hair? You, who tumble between the worlds leaving a trail of sated souls and hearts full to bursting as you ride the very stuff – the very stuff! – of love-capable life? (And here the rubbing intensified till all Dari was conscious of beside Eclipse's words were the all-encompassing everythings of that inexorable finger on one side, that celestial-textured vaginal wall on the other.) To stop leaving tracks is easy, yet you never stop, you ever – journey – on. To not walk upon the ground is hard, yet your walk continues every time you leave it, even – right – here, right – now! Every time you choose to persist in your journey, every time you step through a rift, you are exercising your say in fashioning the realities toward a more beautiful constellation of love. Do you know how many people out there boast of their perfection while adding their hands only to the ruin of every world they touch? How many have in fact turned their backs on all worlds aside from those of their own straitjacketed imaginations, to insist that only their own, and to the crumbling void with what everyone else wants, are the One True Realities? That unspeakable energy, the very same that corrupts the men of your world, that transforms them into swaggering nightmares who I can't even pick up without them screaming and swearing and completely ruining my mood; ten thousand worlds' worth of generals with their armies, admirals with their fleets, creator gods and engineers of souls with their big-headed, self-aggrandising visions that hurt those in whose names they are built then flap to pieces if I so much as blow on them; do you not see how for the sum of all their cunning plans and grand designs and inexhaustible might, they have brought this universe nothing – nothing! – before the contributions of this one – little – girl – right – here (rub, rub, rub) who just by being true to herself, by having the realness*

to ride cupped in the hands of the love of all realities as it ferries her to where it most needs her to go, by never turning back in her choice to carry on those basic imperatives that befit all children of the stars: to journey, and to learn...

She wound off, realising that there was only so much her tiny but oh-so-sufficient captive audience could take. Dari had stopped twitching, her exhausted body a hot and slippery bump beneath the tip of the rhetorical finger; which, now acknowledging this, gave her one final press into the bed of flesh to which the fluids had glued her, then withdrew, allowing the folds to close upon her, layer upon layer, one last time.

A supposition has spread among Eclipse's sisters that some time later, as the specified period elapsed, Dari's core fell from its nest and landed on Eclipse's bed with a *whump!*, gleaming vibrant in a marvellous colour far beyond the visible spectrum. Others however insist that the great investigator merely slipped the little lady's slumbering body out like she does with everyone else's and laid it on her pillow to wait for her to awaken. But no record exists by which to clarify this matter; with the exception, we may suppose, of Eclipse's memory, for whose querying your humble narrator sure as hell will not be the one to approach her.

## 食

So. Was it different this time? Or wasn't it?

"Nnnnn..."

Dari awoke, embraced by a cool softness that for once, her experienced skin reassured her, was not attached to a living body. She exhaled in relief, open her eyes – then yelped at the top of her voice.

Eclipse's ever-purposeful face towered upon her over folded arms so close she could feel their body heat radiate forth, altogether a mountain panorama of breathing cliffs and crags with fierce dark waterfalls cascading off its ridges.

The great presence was reclining on her front. She had nothing on. In the cavern between folded hands and chin, Dari heard, then glimpsed, the rumble of things far bigger than herself.

Poke.

Dari squealed into the pillow.

*Well? Was it the same as always? Or was it, in fact, different this time?*

She forced herself to look, and perceived something strange about the sight of her giant captress. Then she realised it was because this was the first time she'd seen Eclipse from what could properly be called a second-person perspective; that is, while not actually on or in the first person.

She knew she wasn't getting away without an answer.

"B-Both..."

Her pink sky beamed with warm satisfaction.

*I like that answer. It seems this has been a night of considerable edification for both of us.*

*“Nnnnghh...”*

*So. Friends?*

*Dari fainted.*

*Mmm. Come on.*

The gentle pressure of a fingertip rub soon brought the little explorer back to her senses.

*“Nnnn...Eclipse...s-so...tired...”*

*Well, of course you are.*

*“Y-You...oh god, nine hours...and then that...th-that...”*

*I think the term you’re looking for is ‘vaginal oration’.*

*“Urghh...”*

Dari shut her eyes and let the soothing fabric sink beneath her weight. She was vaguely aware of a mental projection of an even tinier version of herself within her own brain, attempting to clamp a suitcase shut around a voice insistently recommending she consider ‘vaginal oration’ for a chapter title one day.

Then her eyes shot open again. *“Why...why am I...t-tingling...”*

Eclipse licked her lips. This was expected. The effects still needed to settle. Better to keep her distracted just a little while longer.

*Well, we’re all done. Doesn’t it feel good? You’ve been such a gracious, cooperative little guest.*

*“G-Gracious...”* Dari repeated. But something didn’t add up. She stopped blinking and put two and two together. *“You mean...”*

*Yes. You are free to leave as you like. On top of that, I have decided to provide you with a little gift to thank you for your cherished...mhm...contributions. I have made arrangements for you to receive it on your way out.*

The mention of a gift clipped her concentration, but she rubbed her eyes and focused, holding fast to her perturbed calculation.

*“B-But then, why am I still in your bed? And...um...y-you’ve taken off all your...”*

The smile widened, stretching across the firmament.

*“Um...Eclipse...w-what...”*

*Oh, we’re not bound to any procedures now, little Dari. I could have put you straight back where I found you, but knew you must be exhausted after all the fun we’ve had together. I’ve kept you here in case you felt a little rest might help you on your way.*

*“Um...t-thank you, I guess...”*

*Sleep as long as you like. Or...*

*“Uh-oh,”* Dari whimpered to herself.

*Or, if you like, seeing as you’ve got me all to yourself right now...we could play a little?*

Eclipse's massive form lurched impossibly onto its forearms. This living geo-organic formation, its sleek cascades, its plains of pink and crimson and magenta; yet from Dari's perspective there was no escaping the total domination of that pair of pendulous terrors, as packed with hot, sweet life as would ever exist in the future yet loaded with the supreme magnitude of the original shape, the formative shape from the earliest past, that which nourished the descent of all forms thereafter. And now, having broken loose of their bindings, they loomed, reared upon her, heaving, swaying, soaring in to corner their delectable prey at last.

"Aaaaaaack...!"

*So. Sleep? Or play?*

"He...he...help!!"

*Tsk. Wrong answer. Come on Dari, you know better by now. You can, of course, do both.*

Dari squealed and flailed her arms and legs in the air as the unspeakable masses descended unto her. As they neared she clenched her eyes, drew her arms in close and waited, waited for the inevitable...

...then, as she realised nothing was happening, she slowly, gingerly risked lifting an eyelid. Then she gasped out loud and squealed again. There they were, suspended either side of her, close enough to touch as they swathed her in their hungering shadow. She was bushed, befuddled, but still every bit as intimidated as when she had first found herself in this phenomenon of a woman's fingers, and now there was nothing to stop what were definitely not fingers cranking the dials of her tiny-flustered-hamster settings off their frames. And yet, at the same time it was as though those surfaces were meadows of paradisiacal desire, saturating her in a waft of pheromones and causing the very air she recoiled in to drip dense with elemental heat and lust. That overworked voice in her brain, which laboured so hard to keep her out of trouble yet whose only ever reward was frustration, screamed from its watchtower with a vengeance: No! Scurry away! Run and don't look back! And yet as it pulled her in one direction, some irresistible force of carnal magnetism froze her to the spot, mesmerised to her very bones by the alluring sway of those implausible, monstrous colossi...

"Aahh...aahh...aahh..."

CLOMP.

"Glmmmmmmphh-!"

...as Eclipse, supporting herself on her elbows, brought her hands in to press them together, plucking up the inevitably wiggling Dari between them. Inhaling dreamily, she manipulated the little lady so her legs fell free of the press, letting them swing down to jut from her cleavage for the sole purpose of allowing her to kick adorably in the air for a while. Then, with the most delicate of pushes in opposite directions, up and down, then down and up, she kneaded her friend up, away, and all the way in.



Her exhaustion temporarily forgotten, Dari moaned and squealed in a flood of nourishing hormones as she was wrestled once more into a world of infinite flesh. But even as she was borne forth, she experienced that it was not a raw and squidgy interrogational flesh like she had experienced in Eclipse's deep dark chambers. Squeezed away into a world where Eclipse's chest was all there was, its vigorous pushes registered in her skin – all of it, naturally – as smooth, hospitable, and totally straightforward in its intent to make her feel held, accepted, cared for by the very substance of a love-based reality.

But first there was a small matter which Eclipse had by no means forgotten. Pressing her bosoms down on the pillows where Dari had been, she felt the tiny lady's wriggling intensify, felt (rather than heard – no sound was getting out of there) her squeaking accelerate to fever pitch, felt (rather than saw – what chance of that?) the redness in her little cheeks ascend the chromatic ladder as they were rubbed into the dominating totality of living, breathing matter at the pinnacles of its power. And then, right where she pinned those firm little legs...

...a tiny series of splashes.

Eclipse giggled.

*Mmm. Couldn't let you go till we'd concluded all streams of the process, could we?*

And then she spun upon her back and simply lay for a time, playing with her chest with softness, affection, and just that necessary dash of mischief as she contemplated the excellence of the night behind her.

*Oh, the marvels of the love that springs forth from the void. To think that however far some worlds might fall – ugh, 'survival and reproduction', 'survival and reproduction', how their deceptions tire me! – to think that even in the midst of such a perfection of lies, there yet spawn gorgeous souls who yearn for the grand embrace; and who in seeking it, surrounded by stark impossibility, cast their dreams to the realms beyond. To seek it, from atop the high horses of reasoning or the thrones of preposterous imagination on which they have squandered their surge to complexity? No: from the most maligned ancient layers of their apparatus of being, shoring up their quest since reptilian days of old, like channels carved diversely in clay which, when watered in the colours of love, come to life in beauteous infinitudes. They protect their secrets well: that still, and since always, the rawest of their urges drives with a trust that power is properly a vessel of care and belonging; and that by nestling transcendent in the warmth within, they affirm Connection.*

She glanced down and patted her chest.

*Sleep tight, my little Dari.*

And now she sat up; stretched her arms out and yawned. She gathered her trousers to her and slid them on, securing each strap one at a time, and from there reassembled her apparel, aligning its colourful panels, adjusting the seams and the clasps, checking that all her instruments and records were in the correct pockets, balancing the mantle which anchored upon her shoulders that splendid cloak that

hunter-gatherers, navigators and astronomers in nine hundred worlds had come to refer to as her 'cloak of stars'; and on this most glorious of mornings, took especial care to fasten the fabric tight and snug around her bust. She did up her boots, counted prime numbers to test for imbalances in the structure of reality – it was okay – then with a sweep of a wing the curtain of her bed was brushed aside, and there stood Eclipse, garbed in the breathtaking finery of her calling.

On her desk – one of her many desks – there stood what looked like a mirror. She approached it, seeing reflected not only her reflection but the reflections of all things. She peered in, as though attempting to fix her indigo flames on something or someone far, far, infinitesimally far in the distance: microscopically invisible, yet by the fierceness of her gaze, of such consequence as might one day reach to touch the mirror's frames.

*You have your truth, she said. It is born of the stars. Let no-one take it from you.*

## 食

And Dari, tiny and intrepid wanderer of the worlds, in a particularly tropical region of the reality beneath all realities that is the peaceful dark of sleep, that dark which connects all who live, have ever lived, and will ever live in the future, heard a voice in her dreams:

*For life born in the colours of love, to survive is not enough. You must also make meaning, make your realities places of wonder and joy, and there are times when to that end, a lovable little toy like you is just what is needed. There are times when absolutely nothing else will do. A toy so cute, but also so real – so, so real – that a girl like I craves with all my heart to clasp you safe inside me, to bathe you in my very deepest founts of desire, or if even that is not enough, to bring our matter together that we may journey forth as one.*

*That is what the universes decided they needed you to mean. It is among the most complex and challenging of all callings, and not just anyone can rise to it. So on behalf of all the realities: thank you, Dari, for being you. Thank you for nourishing so many people, even those forced to dream in chains in those worlds of bleakest gloom, with your reminder that whether they dream to be small when told to be large, or large when told to be small, they honour the realities, and the realities will ever be their home.*

*Rest, traveller. You are loved.*

## 食

Dari scrambled up the rocks the rest of the way to the pavilion, where the diffident dawn of the ancient dwarf sun cast softness on the clouded seas beyond.

Upon the table was a pouch of finest green silk. She approached it, tentatively – you have to be careful with that kind of thing – then tugged loose the ribbon that bound it.

“...chocolate biscuits?”

She knew she shouldn't. But she also knew she should. It had been a long night. She was hungry.

Munching happily, she crept to the pavilion's open side, rested her hand against a pillar and gazed up at the sky. It was still early, it seemed the nights were long here, and the stars still glinted in the dark beyond. Every world she visited presented her a different night sky with new colours, new constellations, and Dari never got tired of basking in the beauty of reality from all these different angles, wondering what yet awaited out there to be explored. Were the realities she visited really all just facets of one single greater reality, such that if she had a telescope powerful enough, she could gaze from one and wave at her friends in the others? Or were they separate realms, crossable only through the rifts, a network of universes in – what was that phrase – a *love-based cosmic community*?

The stars here were beautiful too, but sparser and fainter than she was used to. This world must have been a long, long way from the others.

Walking back beneath the pavilion's dome just in case this place hid any more large surprises, she undertook some stretches. She felt stiff. This was not an unfamiliar feeling. But as she put her arms, legs and core muscles through their motions, she was surprised to feel their tautness subside.

“Ouch! Oohh...”

She had forgotten it, but the soreness in her rib from a previous encounter still came and went.

“And if you'd paid attention to your Ancient Greek back in the day,” she grumbled to herself, “you might have been able to actually communicate with her instead of sounding like you were excited for more. That's what you get Dari, isn't it?”

She sat between the pillars with another biscuit, legs dangling off the crag, still trying to make sense of half the walls of words that spun in her ears like tornadoes of Tetris blocks. Unlike said previous encounter, the agent of her latest could not exactly have been called, well, laconic.

“She's put stuff in these, hasn't she.” Munch. “Well...they're still really tasty. It's just...”

She didn't want to say it, and hurriedly smothered it in her mind in case anyone was listening. Chocolate biscuits just seemed somehow...*anticlimactic*, as a postscript to the intensity of her latest adventure.

They were delicious though. She helped herself to one more, glugged down some refreshingly cool water she poured from the pitcher, then set about remembering how she had got here.

“I came up...that way. Guess I’d better go back. There don’t seem to be any other rifts here.”

She set off – and found that half the mountain had gone.

“Eh?! What...where did it...?”

Gone, just like that. Where the lower part of the outcrop had stood, there was now just a cliff. The sea of clouds had moved in to claim that area. If she squinted, she could just make out, far out of reach, the ripple in the air that indicated the rift where she’d come in.

“What the heck? Urgh! But then, how do I get out of here?”

She looked up to the stars once more.

“Um...Eclipse? Are you there? Did you...?”

She thought she heard the faintest of giggles in the distance.

“Ahh, what do I do?! Does this mean I’m stuck here? That doesn’t...”

She glanced back up at the pavilion; placed her hands in her hair and thought hard; began to pace back and forth, then wandered on the crag at random. This sort of thing had happened before, it practically came with the territory, but there had to be some way – some way that didn’t involve getting snatched...

Something occurred to her.

“Wait a minute. Why do I feel...huh?”

Without quite understanding why, Dari extended her hand, groping in the air with her fingers for something she felt sure was there even though there was nothing to see or hear.

But there was...something.

Wary unease creeping across her face now, she felt for it, fidgeted around; then suddenly grappled on to something with fingers bent. It felt somehow textureless, barely solid, yet resisted stubbornly if she pulled it.

“I’ve...I’ve never come across anything like this before. What do I do with...?”

*Pull harder*, said an instinct.

She pulled, but it didn’t budge. She squared her legs, girded herself with a deep breath, fumbled with her other hand near the first till its fingers hooked upon the same surface. She heaved again. It wavered beneath her hands, loosening, approaching the critical frequency –

Then it tore away so fast that she stumbled in surprise, almost lost her hold, and reflexively threw her shoulder against it to keep it down. There, right there, a glimmering window, her hands – her own body! – holding down the sill; and on the other side a glorious summer sky, tropical plants, white sands, blue seas...

“But that’s...that’s...aah!”

Her utter shock at the sight of one of her most familiar and favourite realities, right there, just like that, caused her to lose her grip on the curtain between the worlds and fall back. She landed on her rear just in time to watch it snap shut with a *whish!* and once more there was nothing there but air.

Dari raised her hands in front of her face.

“Did I just...? No...no way...”

Leaping to her feet and feeling her heart thump in her chest, she stretched her arms out again, felt around, brushed up against that familiar sensation of resistance and clamped her fingers round it tight. She tensed herself again. Pull...pull...pull...

She heaved it open – and gasped. A vast sea with an island in the distance, and she thought she could just make out tiny figures wandering about on it: figures like...animals, only walking upright? Doing stretches, watering flowers, fishing along the coast; a weird sight to be sure, but also kind of cute, and if she drew her eyes away she could make out similar islands scattered about the horizon...

The rim of the rift shuddered beneath her fingers. Her arm was bent at an awkward angle this time, and the disturbance forced her to let go. The moment she did, it zipped shut.

“Oh my god...I can open rifts...”

She craned her neck upwards again. The stars were fading as the misty light of day bathed the clouds in a mellow glow.

“Um...Eclipse? Did you...?”

Excitement, confusion and apprehension vied for control in her heart as she tried again. Anchor. Feel. Grip. Breathe. Pull –

She shrieked. A hideous monster stood at a pulpit, its hide as orange as the most destructive brands of crisps she had ever consumed in her old world. It had minuscule hands, and on its head was a mat of...material, it couldn't be called hair that was for sure, and from its dripping maw spewed bile ten thousand times more corrosive than the contents of all the digestive passages she had ever traversed if concentrated together. In a bloodthirsty frenzy it belched the stuff onto a crowd of humanoid spectators who mutated at its touch, whooping and baying with the glee of a bloodcurdling genocidal tradition as they transformed into –

Dari didn't wait to find out, she as much as hurled the rift from her hands and heaved a sigh of relief as it shut off that scene as though it had never been there in the first place.

Her apprehension pulled ahead. She was experienced enough to know that there were dangerous realities out there; realities that just somehow *weren't real*. To create rifts by herself – or were these rifts there all along, only beyond her perception till now? – well, the implications were clearly momentous. But without some degree of control, such a faculty might be far more trouble than it was worth.

“But...I guess I can't get out of here without it. How do I control it? Couldn't she have given me...um, an instruction manual or something?”

Alright, she told herself. Calm. Breathe. You can do this. Think. Think of where you want to go.

Her friends. She could do with those comforts now, the chance to sit back and close her eyes without fear of getting scooped up by strangers. To think without

feeling eaten by the very matters she was thinking about. And she still needed to get her notes down about those tarantulas.

Various familiar bedrooms flashed through her mind as she felt for the seam once more. She found it. Excitement flooded her veins as she pulled...

*Now hold on. A voice – Eclipse? Focus on one first, don't try it while flittering through several at once, otherwise...never mind. Oh Dari.*

“Eeeeeeeek! What – what the heck is that?!”

She went tumbling onto her backside again as the rift yawned open, four times the size of the previous ones. Filling it was – what? Some...landscape, or planet, made entirely of flesh, and it had tentacles and plushy lips and heaving mounds and apertures of all descriptions, and there were even huger ones looming like skyscrapers or cliff formations in the background, all swaying and swelling and discharging noises unheard of in all but the remotest realities at the furthest edges of existence; and eyes, huge alluring eyes in whose pupils the affairs of mortal life seemed to vanish into a glimmer – and they were all looking at her!

“Aah! W-What have I done? Help!”

**Oh? Hello there.**

The rift wasn't closing.

And somehow Dari knew, in a way she wouldn't have before, that just because the voice was a woman's, didn't mean it couldn't be that of a galactic abomination at the same time.

An enormous tentacle lurched through the rift, as thick as an iceberg and twice as wide as Dari was tall.

“I...I'm sorry! What are – I didn't mean to – aah! No! W-Wait! I – glmmphh!”

It gathered her up, tucking her body in a single coil, and wheeled away with her into the rift. This time it shut.

*Oh, Dari. Dari Dari Dari. When I told you you were part of something greater than you know, you know you didn't have to take it so literally, right? But I guess you wouldn't be Dari if you didn't.*

Eclipse watched with a mischievous grin from the shadows between worlds. The way ahead would be long for that girl, and far from easy, but she had more than shown she was up to it – ‘to not walk upon the ground is hard’, and all that – so surely there was nothing wrong with just the lightest of gifts to her aptitude as a riftwalker. That knack of hers could grow incredibly powerful one day, Eclipse thought; in time might warrant mention in the same breath as her own – if, that is, she took the considerable time and patience to master it. In the meantime she was bound to carry on playing with it in silly ways like that and ending up in *tight spots*, so it was not as though she, Eclipse, had done anything to fundamentally unsettle the little one's cosmic situation.

*Still – I didn't expect you to run into...her, so quickly. Well, water under the bridge. Mmm, you'll enjoy this one. But...hmm. Just in case, I think I'd better...*

She concentrated; communicated.

## THE TRIANGULATION OF DARI

*Go easy on her, won't you?*

**But she's such a tiny one. So squirmy. So – right, get in there you.**

Eclipse suppressed a giggle as her ears picked out a tiny *squish!* in the midst of the otherworldly bio-chorus.

*That she is. But I kind of worked her hard, and she still has much to think on. Oh, and – don't eat the biscuits. They're hers.*

Eclipse satisfied herself with that; those entities were nothing if not dependable. She spread her wings wide. But before she took off, she placed her ear to the edge of that realm, and listened. Listened hard. That was thick flesh they had, it was tricky to make out the sounds from such depths, even for her, but it would brighten her mood for the whole day if she could catch it, just one more time...

And she smiled. There it was.

“Mmmphh...”

### 食

*Everything passes on and everything remains,  
But our lot is to pass on,  
To go on making paths,  
Paths across the sea.*

*I never sought glory,  
Nor to leave my song  
In the memory of man;  
I love those subtle worlds,  
Weightless and graceful,  
As bubbles of soap.*

*Traveller, the path  
Is your tracks and nothing more;  
Traveller, there is no path,  
The path is made by walking.*

*Beat by beat, verse by verse...*

**Antonio Machado, 1912 CE**

