

Illimitable

The vacuum and the dark were illimitable. One might imagine silence or the hiss of sand, listen for a scream and never hear it, listen for nothing and hear a thousand screams. I heard it all at once. My head split with it, with the crack of rocks breaking my skull and the percussion of a dozen cannons firing over and over.

There was no sound but static.

I felt myself drifting fetally, submerged, breathing and confused. There was no water here. No waves. No shore. Still, I was sure this was an ocean.

“Unconventionally,” the void suggested, “this could be an ocean.”

Oh, I thought. *Of course*. It was the ocean chaos, the absence of matter, the dimensionless space before creation.

“If this ocean contains the building blocks of the universe,” said the void, “what chaos exists before genesis?”

As if in response, I saw something flash beneath my feet, a blur of black and white. A throne. I supposed it was my throne. Made up of skeletons wound together like sculpted marble. Every few seconds, flashes of flesh molded over the distorted poses. The bodies writhed, trying to force themselves back into their original shapes, but the flashes were too brief, the bones too disfigured. They never moved far enough.

I had not made it for myself, but I sat anyway. I waited. It might have been a lifetime. It might have been a few minutes.

“Chaos,” a mild voice spoke, muffled from the way its speaker knelt with his head lowered to his chest. It was Night. “Chance saw someone flying above the chasm—an angel, he says.”

“Which angel?” It took me a moment to realize the question was my own.

“Lucifer.”

I had not known until the name was spoken who Lucifer was, but now that I’d heard it, I felt sure I’d always known.

“Lucifer. Why is Lucifer flying above my sea?”

“He has fallen, sir.”

Fallen? Was Heaven so unforgiving? I couldn’t believe it.

“Can’t you?” whispered the void.

It's happened before, I remembered. *I watched it happen*. Eternity was staggering, truly, for nothing new would ever happen again.

"I will speak to him."

"He's—" started Night.

"I know where he is."

I stepped from one corner of my abyss to the other, spotted the tiny seraph gliding above me like a speck of dust. I could drag the angel down and devour him. Or boost him forward, send him straight to Heaven or plummeting to Hell.

"There's no way to Heaven from your realm, little king," chided the void.

"Angel Lucifer!" I bellowed from the black depths. I met the angel above, took my warped throne like it had always been there, waiting for me. Lucifer did not start. He looked pleased.

"Creature Chaos." His eyes were serpent sharp, and his voice carried the timbre of a cunning fox. "I am glad to find you."

"I watched you fall," I said. "Your horde dipped straight through my domain."

"You did not stop us."

"There was no need. You were here for a moment, a drop in eternity." It wasn't true. The angels fell longer than I had predicted, longer still than I could have imagined. It was remarkable to have one of them come back—though I had known one would. Somewhere in my tumultuous mind, I knew.

"But I've returned."

"You have. Is there a reason, favored of God?"

"I am favored no more."

I knew that well; it was as shared between us as the sea we treaded.

"I must know," said Lucifer, "where is God's beloved new creation?"

"What will you do to it?"

"Nothing He does not expect."

I lifted a brow, wondered why Lucifer bothered with this scheme at all. The angel seemed so young to me then, so small, like a chip in the floor of a trench.

"Come," I said. "I will take you to Eden."

* * *

I heard the thousand screams and reached for them. Something oily and black reached back. It tapped my fingertip. It latched onto my palm and clung to the space beneath my fingernails. It slithered up my arm and conformed itself around all of me. It wormed into my mouth, ears, eyes like a hungry second skin.

I would have relished the true silence of clogged ears, but my own choked screams wouldn't allow it.

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I stepped, and the black sea rippled out around my bare foot. I had never walked on it before, not that I could remember. The sensation felt wrong, like I had glitched through the wall into an unplayable space.

With a splintering clap, the air around me shattered into jagged lines of broken glass, distorting the colorless wall of chaos into something new, a mirror that didn't reflect.

I stepped farther, brushing my fingertips against the broken, solid space.

It cracked. I broke through.

* * *

I pressed my palm to the man's chest, feeling it rise and fall, the warmth of bare skin, the touch of a living, breathing thing against my dead hand, and it was so different from anything I had felt before. And it was so familiar.

The man's eyes opened lethargically; I didn't move.

"Hi," he said slowly, looking back and forth between his own chest and my eyes. "I fell asleep."

"You must have," I said. "By the rhythm and rate of your breathing, you must have been sleeping deeply." I tightened my gaze. "But now your heart rate's spiking."

He sat up, carefully removing my hand from his chest. White sand stuck to his back, a few grains sprinkling down near my toes.

"I'm sorry," he stammered, "who are you?"

I watched the sun beat down on the glittering ocean waves. Then I tilted my head back and imagined falling into *my* ocean, landing in the abyss and looking up at an airless black sky. I saw the chasm and the things slithering beneath its smokey black surface. I saw myself in the reflection and wondered if this was real.

"I—" *don't exist anymore.*

“Beau!” It was a woman. Her hair was the same color as his—dirty blonde with a few lighter strands. His sister.

“What are you doing?” she asked. “Why are you so red?”

“Sunburn,” I suggested, shielding my eyes from the light with one hand.

She looked at me then, as if she’d just noticed I was there.

“I fell asleep,” Beau said.

“You’ll definitely burn doing that. Do you need sunscreen?”

He shook his head.

She wasn’t convinced. “Who’s this?” she asked, gesturing to me with her head.

I told her my name. It sounded wrong here, like car horns and dissonance.

“I was just passing by,” I said. “He didn’t look like he was breathing, so I checked to make sure.”

The void tilted. “You regret saying that,” it mused. “You’re afraid she thought you were lying.”

Oh. I get it now. I understood why this felt wrong. Why it blurred. Why their voices had been so faint. I wasn’t here. I was still there. I saw this from the void, a scene muffled by space and distance.

It devoured me.

I thought of calm, peace, order. I thought of Beau, of that memory, and felt it had not been mine because this was me—eternal disorder, this quiet chaos where calm, peace and order had stored me. I felt the absence of my hatred but not the hatred itself. Where had it gone?

“Are you glad I spirited you away from that life?”

No.

“Yes.”

“You’re not,” the void corrected, “but you will be.”

* * *

The burden of remembering was lost to me, as most divinity was. I was human once, plucked from mortality like a grape from a vine, given divine eternity, a forever loop, and nothing else. I felt everything as humanity did. My pain, my love and longing and sorrow were not dulled by ancience. Even as I became ancient.

Time was amorphous. It moved like a grotesque, shifting and moving and repeating, an infinite serpent consuming itself tail first. I often found it skipping forward, rewinding back, blending epochs like paints.

Lucifer returned to my abyss with Heaven on his heels. I could not help him. There was no power in chaos. I could not command it if there were.

“I’m the ingredients,” I told him. “God is the creator.”

“Can you not stand against Him?”

I laughed. “And what would I stand on? There is nothing material in chaos. I sink. I fall. But there is no Hell waiting for me at the bottom. No demons to command or people to torment.”

“What of your court? Night and Chance? Tumult, Discord—”

“Who do you think I am Satan?”

“God encroaches on your domain every time He creates, but He cannot do it without you.”

“You assume I have stake in that exchange. I exist *for* Him. And so do you. So does everything. You will get nothing from me. I have nothing to give.”

He left, and God turned him and his horde to snakes.

“You didn’t even try,” said the void. “You might have managed something with his help.”

“Against you?” I said. “Impossible. I think you’re just bored.”

“I’m forever doomed to boredom.”

“How terrible that must be for you.”