

After Everything

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"Who the hell are you?" A strange voice echoed from behind me. I turned to face it. Well, not exactly *turned*. Wait, where was my body? I looked all around, or...perceived all around? It's difficult to explain. I was without form, and seemingly, so was everything. I was met with no light, or sound, or smells. I strained to perceive in every direction as far as I could, but there was no distance here, either. My consciousness was alone in an apparently endless, shapeless, timeless, yet somehow familiar, void. Well, not *entirely* alone. A loud **ahem** emanated from...somewhere.

"I'll ask again, who the hell are you? Nobody is supposed to be here now."

"Where am I?" I asked, trying to focus in on this other being.

"I believe *I* asked first. Wait, hold on a second, I'm omniscient. I can know exactly who you are." The being let out a clicking sound, perhaps a snap of the fingers. "Of course. Delaney Forsyth. Colorado. 1994 to 2020. Human. Ah, right, so this all must be very confusing to you. Here." Another click, and suddenly a physical form appeared before me. A tall figure ran their hand through their short, well kept hair. They wore brilliant gold robes, and had deep, grey eyes. "This might be a bit more comprehensible, now."

I looked down - for real this time! I had hands! And feet! And a body! And it was the one I was used to!

But the physical form of the being and myself appearing out of nothing did little to abate my confusion. "Where am I? What's happening to me? Who are you?" I asked.

"Well, you see, I'm God." The being dropped their microphone, which rolled away after a loud thud.

I collapsed onto the ground, sitting loosely cross-legged. "Did I go into one of those sensory deprivation tanks? That would explain the nothing followed by...this." I motioned towards the so-called god.

"If I was a dream, could I do, *THIS?*" The last word of the sentence echoed through the void, as the being suddenly grew to an immeasurable size.

"Yes, a dream could do exactly that," I said plainly. The being returned to normal stature, dusting off their silver robes, and sighed.

"I suppose you're right. Well, it wouldn't be fair for me to take this personally, I haven't made the effort to visit the World in a while. I'm quite the introvert, you understand, and I need a few millennia to recharge after socializing. But no, I'm afraid this is all quite real. And this 'nothing' is actually Everything. You're all that's left."

God came over to me. They plopped down in the pile of plush pillows to my side, and straightened their pajamas. Small giraffes were dotted across the fabric. Most hardly spared a passing glance at me, as they chowed down on a nice lunch of leaves. "Your people had a little theory. 'False vacuum'. Turns out it was correct. Turns out *I* was *incorrect* in some of my initial calibrations. Ripped your planet to shreds at the speed of light, you could have never seen it coming. It should be about finished with the edges of the universe soon." They raised their arm, glancing at an elaborate, gleaming watch. "Or it's

already done. I don't know. Time has no meaning here." Another sigh. "It's a shame, it got to you on November 2nd. I was very interested to see how your country's election was going to go."

"You mean, you don't know how it ended? I thought you said you're omniscient."

"I can be. But I've realized that finding things out is often the fun part. Speaking of which, I'm still not entirely sure why *you're* here." God leaned in real close, and looked me straight in the eye. Their own irises were bright blue. They sat like that for a while. Perhaps an eternity. The unblinking gaze of their violet eyes dug into my very soul. "Right. Riiight. Well, this is quite funny. It turns out you're immortal."

"What?"

"Yes. Definitely immortal. Which really seems the only possible answer, when you think about it. Still not sure how that came to be, but when your universe went, well, ya know, kaput, it ruptured your physical form, leaving only your mind behind."

I stood up again, and began pacing. My hands clasped either side of my head. God stood up, too. Their bright blue tie swayed back and forth across their suit as they watched me, a hand on their chin, and a stern look across their face. I wasn't sure if they could be believed, but all my senses were telling me to trust what this being was saying. Somehow they seemed trustworthy, comforting, even familiar. Maybe this actually was God. Which would make this place actually...Everything. All that's left.

Mere moments ago, I had been outside a coffee shop, sitting six feet away from my date, Harry Capaldi from school, wondering if I *actually* liked coffee and why I didn't buy an iced tea instead and if I found Harry's laugh annoying or cute and if I should be reading over my dissertation instead of being on a date or if I was actually working too hard lately. Moments ago. Or perhaps, an eternity ago. It might as well have been, because it was all gone, and already the details were growing fuzzy.

God pulled their sweater over their head, threw it into a pile of laundry, and revealed a greasy "I <3 NYC" T-shirt underneath.

"Listen, I understand this is a lot to take in," they said, swishing their paper fan over their face. "You might need a few thousand years to sort through it properly. But my shift's about to end here." They took another look at their golden pocket watch, before quickly placing it back in the bag along the side of their infinitely long, flowing dress.

"Your shift?"

"Yes, well, now that my universe has ended, I'm off duty. I really need to get going. But hey, that means my station is all free. You seem a trustworthy lass, why don't you give your own universe a spin?"

I stopped pacing and looked at God, who was hanging up their nametag and cap at the front. "Surely there's someone else more qualified to do this," I said.

"Sure there is. We've got a long waiting list. But time is more or less meaningless here, so I don't think there will be any harm in making them wait an incomprehensible amount of time more than they already have."

"I...I don't think I can stand to be alone for millennia like you," I said. I thought about Harry and his cute laugh.

"You don't have to! Your universe, your rules. You could live amongst your creations, you could even

live life exactly as you did before you arrived here. Not that I can imagine *why* you would want a fate so dull, although I'm sure I could come up with some reasons if I snapped my omniscience on again."

"Exactly as I was before..." I trailed off, my mind returning to the coffee shop. But it ventured elsewhere, too. *Before. Before. Before...Everything.* Something clicked inside me. "Wait, I know who you are."

"I already told you, I'm God."

"No, you're not. At least, not in the way you think. *I am God.*" Suddenly my consciousness grew infinitely large to the size of an ant, my arms stretched impossibly far like a tomorrow of next year, my ears boomed with the full silence of Everything that lay before me, before I returned to my previous form.

"Oh," God said, still holding their nametag. "I see."

"You've done exactly as I asked," I explained.

"Yes, yes, of course, I remember now. We've been here before, you and I. Many times."

"You've managed this world very well, once again. Minus one little thing." God blushed. "I will show you how to fix the False Vacuum problem with the least impact on the other parameters you set, and we'll carry on where we left off. I think we both want to see how that election turns out." Corrections were made. In the moment before none of this had happened, I wrote this with my final omniscient thought, and returned to my coffee shop, and the simple life of Delaney Forsyth, a God who isn't, but always was.