

Time

Galath was standing by the transparent wall of the room overlooking the landscape beneath him like so many times before. What he saw was not what we would have seen standing there, because our eyes cannot see into the infrared and ultraviolet, nor can they focus on a tiny spot and enlarge it by adjustment of eye lenses. Galath's eyes could. He had seen these forests, mountains and meadows more than a million times, but he still enjoyed the view of nature, plants and animals alike, as it always put him in a meditative state of mind. This time though, it was not enough to ease his pain.

His wife was late for dinner. He had arranged to eat in this room because of the memories. He and his wife did not really have to eat as long as their bodies were regularly exposed to the sun, but it still gave him pleasure once in a while, and because of the memories, dinner was an important part of the nights arrangements. The floor was covered with sand and everything in the room was arranged like an old fashioned beach. The dinner table was located below a palm tree.

His wife Orchid walked up into the room from downstairs. She was beautiful as ever.

"You have it all set up I see," she said.

"I wanted it to be special," he replied.

They sat down to eat. The dinner that Galath had prepared came in from the kitchen, floating on airy nanostructures that no longer mattered except for their purpose. Galath was a bio engineer by heart, although educated in many other things, and the workings of inorganic machinery did not really interest him. All the artificial intelligence they surrounded themselves with took care of the machinery.

Every course of tonight's dinner was as he remembered it. And Galath had a good memory. As the human organism had become immortal, a need for better memory had arisen. At first the scientists just increased the capacity, but as people did not want to walk around with giant heads in order to fit in a huge memory, other solutions were presented. The brain was finally adjusted in such a way that it was possible for an individual to keep selected memories and forget the unimportant ones. Attempts to keep too many memories would, as a side effect led to headaches and loss of certain brain functions. As a consequence, the immortal human being would have to learn to prioritize, and save their memories in data files as video, pictures, written material and others. As time went by, this was automated by machines, making it trivial to people to review the parts of their lives they no longer remembered. To some it was like reliving it. Others no longer cared for the past.

"I know what you are trying to do," Orchid said, and Galath could hear that she also still had this memory clear. He also sensed that which he had somehow known for a while but had refused to accept. That Orchid was growing tired. But was she tired of him, of her work, or what? He was confused.

"You have the fish completely right," she said. "It is even fried the right way, a bit charred on one side, just as I remember it."

They finished the meal under light conversation, exchanging trivial comments about this and that. Galath reached out for the artificial intelligence with his mind, and the faint music that had accompanied their dinner grew in strength.

“Care for a dance?” he asked.

“Of course,” Orchid answered.

They stood up and started dancing, close, cheek to cheek.

“I am going to leave you,” Orchid said. Galath froze. He somehow knew it was coming, but still he was unable to prepare for it. Why tonight, and why like this? Galath and Orchid had lived for billions of years. They had seen stars die and new stars being born, most of them together. In the early days they travelled from solar system to solar system, terraforming planets and creating life where they went. As the life they had created matured and started to spread on its own their work changed character. They created exotic and strange worlds, they created utopias where animals and plants lived in harmony, without predators, fighting, disease and overpopulation. Sometimes they spent millions of years watching their work unfold, sometimes one project immediately led to the other. Over time the work slowed down as they achieved their original goals and found satisfaction with their results. They sometimes lived among humans, sometimes among animals and sometimes they isolated themselves for millennia trying to work out one problem or the other. Later on they travelled the galaxies and met with other lifeforms, some of which they themselves had created so many years ago. Next to those billions of years these last years were but a second, and this evening a blink of an eye. He could not comprehend.

“I still like you,” she said, “but I no longer really care for us. Not sure I really care for anything anymore. Maybe I have lived too long.” She gave him a smile.

“Goodbye Galath.” She turned around and without looking back she went to the exit and stepped out on the platform that would take her down. The platform floated downwards until she was out of sight. She was gone.

Galath fell to his knees. His fists closed upon handfuls of sand. He raised one hand, opened it, and watched the sand run out between his fingers.

“Time,” he said, “is slipping through my fingers, like sand in an hourglass.” He looked up, but there was no one to hear him speak. He was alone.