Gravity of Clouds

Grav sat encompassed in the deer-hide chair, straining to read in the dying light. The invention of books and paper had been phenomenal in destroying his boredom. Sure, he had to lift many of the books he read from his fellow farmers or travel to find them, but they gave him solace in his solitude.

Red dust glimmered as a breeze chewed at the brush, sunlight gleaming through bottles of colored glass. Swinging his legs from their prop on the wood stool, Grav stood and shuffled towards the creeping garbage that walled in his kitchen. He waded through the towers of stacked sacks, promising himself to take it out to burn when he got the time.

Bright green wallpaper, newly glued, framed the city of dishes populated by food particles that only he could hold down by tiny black threads wrapped around the dishes, like vines, anchoring them to the spot. Grav started to root around in the icebox, looking for anything cool to eat. Finding nothing that didn’t have forest green growing on it, he retreated. Heaving himself back onto the chair, he relaxed into it. Flashing light drew his attention to the bottle-cluttered window where a single brown feather floated to the ground.

Rubbing his eyes, he braced himself, waiting for the bad omen to walk through his door. He wasn’t disappointed.

The wooden door flew open, banging against the dented wall. The silhouette of a human-sized barn owl stood in his doorway. One powerful wing reached to the back of the neck, releasing the true being at the unsnapping of a clip. Stepping over the crumbled skin, a white wooden doll walked gracefully towards him.

“No wonder the locals are terrified of owls. Every time you fly here someone’s baby pops out with some deadly mutation.” Grav said, looking around his chair at Mut. “You need to have better control.”

Mut shrugged, “It’s not my fault that the gene was already there, waiting to be exploited.” The wood on her arm starts to prickle with fur, her nose flattening and prickling with fur. Flinging herself into a waiting rabbit skinned chair, Mut sprawled, making herself at home. “I have a report from Eve. She has an idea for a the next experiment, but needs your help.”

Scrapping the legs against the wooden floor, Grav adjusted so he was facing Mut. Black threads drooping towards the ground, covering his chair completely, “Why isn’t she here now?” he asked.

“Had some things to talk to Math about. We’re trying to get permission for the experiment.”

“I don’t think your going to get it.” Grav levered himself up. Brushing black threads from his grey eyes, he shuffled to the cupboard. Pulling out two cups, he asked, “Drink?”

Mut swiveled her head, “No thanks.” He filled his cup up with water. “Why do you drink?”

“Habit.” He said.

“How’d it start again?”

“The neighbors were to friendly.”

“Ah, I remember them. They didn’t seem to like me and Eve.” Mut said. A smile spread, exposing the slow sharpening of her pearl teeth.

“I wonder why?” Grav said, threads twitching. “Oh I know. You kept asking them about their recessive genes.”

“It’s not my fault that we are ahead of the humans. They really need to catch up to us and stop thinking of us in the fantastical, mythical way.” Mut said, fingers tapping against the chair. “They can’t keep referring to me as Loki, though the Vikings were rather fun to drink with.”

“They ran you out of their villages for playing *tricks* on them.” Grav said.

“I was only exploiting their genes to make them more interesting.”

“People rarely see it that way.” Grav leaned against the counter sipping at the water, a small comfort. “Do you think you’ll get permission?”

“Of course, why wouldn’t we?” Mut asked.

“Maybe because your last flying-human scheme failed so miserably that you were forced to call in Chem to euthanize all of them.” Grav said bitingly.

“You do get attached to your humans don’t you.” Mut said.

“Of course, I am connected to all of them, holding them down, renamed ‘the man’,” Grav performed air-quotes with a group of threads.

“Woah, calm down now, don’t want you releasing the living masses into space.” Mut’s flipper-hands waved in a calm-down motion. “Don’t want another dinosaur extinction, Eve really won’t forgive you then.”

Grav huffed, sipping moodily at the water. Doing his breathing exercises to keep calm.

“This time we are only going to have one at a time. Not a whole bunch.” Mut said, keeping her voice level. “This way we can keep them from breeding and escaping back to earth to make…what did they call themselves, Nephies. No. Nerphs, Nellies….” Mut kept muttering to herself, trying to remember.

“Nephilim.” Grav supplied.

“That’s it. That was a mess. Had to make so many diseases to kill them off, Chemistry and Elements just couldn’t handle it themselves.” Mut’s hands clutched at her cheeks, “But don’t worry. We are only going to perform the experiment on one person, and this newly established country is ripe with potential subjects.”

“Well you’re going to have to choose quickly, states are already seceding, I predict a civil war will break out soon. You’ll have your work cut out for you to keep the chosen family alive.” Threads tossed two yellowed newspaper to Mut. She caught them and unrolled them. “The south is calling themselves the Confederate States of America. War will break out.”

Mut smiled warmly at Grav, “No they won’t, this is just some landowners throwing a few tantrums. They’ll rejoin the union within the year. And why do you even care, you’re in the New Mexico Territory, no where near the conflict.” She started flipping through the magazine. “How’d you get these anyway? Have you started going out again?” Her black eyes started to bleed yellow, “I’m so proud of you. It’s been millions of years since you have left this house you built, by the way, looking sturdy.”

Grav snorted, “I haven’t gone outside. I’ve been transporting things along the threads, they take care of me.” The threads flowed towards him; he reached out a hand and petted the group. They quivered in happiness.

Mut whistled, “Wow. Didn’t know you could do that. Did you tell Physics?”

His nose wrinkled, “Of course. It’s rather hard for me to hide such a thing from Physics, he is my maker after all.”

“You just don’t have a spine is all.” Mut teased.

“Or I have the potential to kill everyone on this planet.” Grav said into his cup.

“What?”

“Nothing. Now, why do you need me in this venture?”

“We, Eve and I, wanted you to alter the gravity on the test subjects and to also help us pick them out. You have a lot more time on your hands than we do.” Mut said. She gave Grav her best smile, all jagged.

Holding out his hand, he said, “Fine. Give me the files of the possible and I will have an answer within the week.”

Mut pulled the papers from her bag.

Handing them over, she gave Grav a big hug. “Thank you so much. We’ll have so much fun I know it.” Stepping into her suit, she pulled it on. “Next time I’ll bring Eve so you can have someone clean this place, it’s a dump.”

“I know.” Grav said, starting to read the first file. A couple in Kentucky had caught their wayward eye. They wanted kids, and they already had the genetic markers that were prime for altering. Grav waved his hand as Mut said goodbye. He heard the door close, creaking a bit as it shook against the hinges. Grav looked in time to see Mut taking off. He would so much prefer to have her leave by horse or one of those new automobiles instead of by flight. He wasn’t that hard to get to.

It took five generations for Eve and Mut to finally find their perfect child. It took a lot of interference on their part to get the proper genetic matches. Eve ranted about how sloppy and perpetually changing people were. She would push them towards one coffee shop where their perfect match was waiting and the target would suddenly change their mind, wanting soup instead. Grav would just nod his head and smile as he flipped through channels, looking for a movie he hadn’t seen.

Electricity, for once in his life, actually had a good idea. He had pushed all of the Concepts towards following in the modern human’s footsteps by getting televisions, cell phones and every new gadget that came out. It wasn’t hard to get the actually technology, what with having abilities to influence the world around people, altering their perception on what kind of money you are giving them, is child’s play. There were still a few walnuts in circulation, which was the reason vending machines would reject bills. Though with everyone going digital with paying, it became easier and easier to buy things. Since most of it is electrical pulses and data, data that can easily be faked.

Grav’s favorite invention had been the Internet and computer. He didn’t need to leave his house to experience the world around him. He didn’t need to interact or talk to Eve and Mut without them having to fly all the way too him. He actually got to meet Nessy for the first and last time through Skype. She had died soon after from some kind of new pollutant in her loch. Eve and Mut hadn’t thought pollutants as a threat to Nessy, but they were wrong.

Nessy had been a way for them to see if they could bring back dinosaurs. Which Grav still felt bad about, since that had been the only time he had lost control and accidentally released his hold on the overgrown reptiles. Since then, he had been locked away in his house for centuries, only coming out when Physics, Mut or Eve ordered him out.

They always threatened to burn down his house if he didn’t leave. He couldn’t allow the flames to feed upon all the first editions that he had collected over the years. That was just barbaric.

Eve and Mut had messaged him earlier that they were bringing someone over and he needed his suit. If he needed his suit, Grav had a suspicion that either Francis was coming over, or Mut and Eve’s new test subject was of proper age and they had somehow convinced them that they should come over.

Sliding into a suit, he smoothed out the tendrils that were trying to poke through. He would have to ask Genetic to grow him another suit. This one was starting to crack and he had to throw the first one away a while ago. Well more like burn it. Genetic was still trying to figure out what made them turn to goo after awhile. Toxic goo for that matter, slimy and full of floating pieces of cracked skin made Grav throw up a little every time he had to look at it.

A hollow banging came from his door and he shuffled his way through the towers of books, garbage and movies. His house keeping had really gotten away from him after he had purchased the reinforced door with nine matching locks. There was just something about keeping his first editions safe from the outside world that garnered spending a little extra on the doors, plus it helped that Mut wasn’t knocking it down anymore.

Flipping the three dead bolts open, twisting and pulling the two padlocks open, sliding the two chains, sliding a thin tendril along one sensor and twisting the key in the door knob finally released the airtight seal.

Pulling the door towards him, he squinted his eyes as the New Mexican sun gleamed harshly into them. Mut and Eve stood in front of him…and Mut was cradling a toddler in her arms.

“What is that?” he asked.

Mut and Eve pushed passed him. “We had some trouble obtaining her, parents are so protective nowadays.” Eve said.

“I blame the grandmother. Remember she got a glimpse of us in true form, and started to be overprotective of everyone.” Mut said as she cleared books off of one of the purple chairs before falling in it. “We barely lost the police half an hour ago. They were so persistent.”

“You do realize you kidnapped a child?” he asked as he stared nervously at the child. “What did you do to her?” he didn’t think any kid would be sleeping as two deranged women took her from her parents.

“She’s the test subject and technically came willingly.” Eve said, running her manicured suit hands through the girl’s dark brown hair.

“Willingly? The police were chasing you. That speaks volumes against you.” He started to ring his hands, “I thought you were going to wait until she was at least of drinking age so she could drink her loneliness away!”

Eve raised a delicate eyebrow of the heart shaped face she was wearing. “We grabbed her this early so that she would get acclimated and wouldn’t be lonely. It would defeat the process if she died of alcohol poisoning before the experiment is over.”

Wringing his hands, he asked, “Are you sure Math is okay with this? Should we ask Gen to take care of her. Gen’s always been the nurturing type, she would enjoy this right? What about Francis? Taking care of a child is a full time thing. They need actual food, friends…”

Mut pinched Grav’s cheeks together. “Breathe Gravity, breathe.”

Grav breathed in through the suit’s nose, a whistle indicating misalignment whispered against Mut’s intruding hand. “Who do you think helped us knock her out? Lem of course. She was very generous with the chloroform.” Mut grinned.

Pulling his face away from Mut’s grasp, Grav quickly skirted around the piles to Eve’s side. His hands fluttered over her head, as he tried to see if she was breathing. “You used chloroform? Is she all right?” he asked. The threads were starting to boil underneath the pale skin of his suit.

Eve rolled her eyes towards his dirty white ceiling. Pushing the child into his arms, she turned to Mut. Jerking her head to the door, she said, “Come on, it’s time to go.”

Mut leaned forward, green tinted blonde hair swinging forward, “But why? I want to say goodbye to Jo.” Mut jutted out her bottom lip, pouting at Eve, begging with her false blue eyes to stay and watch.

Grav could only say syllables as his head, boiling with threads trying to get out, looked from Jo to Mut and Eve.

“Mut, we need to get back to Francis. He is finally experiencing urges towards the opposite sex and we need to be there for him.”

Mut worried her lip, eyes darting around the room. “But can’t you do that by yourself?”

“I need someone to watch over Maggie. If we can convince Francis to make the first move, then we can possibly get Maggie interested.” Eve tapped her foot. “Now let’s go.” She swept her hand towards the door, as the other rested on the lip of her black pencil skirt.

Mut’s head dropped as she slumped up from the chair. “Thanks for having us Grav. We’ll be in touch. Take good care of Jo.” Mut exaggerated her dragging feet as she passed Eve.

“Wait,” Grav said. He adjusted Jo to his hip, her head lolling backwards. His free hand shot up and pushed her head against his shoulder. “You’re leaving me with a toddler? Me! I can barely take care of myself, and you want me to take care of your forced volunteer?”

“Yes.” Eve said. Looking down at her wrist, she sighed. “And we are bordering on being late of the time that I told Francis we would be there.” Turning on her pump-enclosed heel, Eve started herding Mut out of the door. “We’ll be back tomorrow with some groceries. Don’t worry she’ll be sleeping for a while and will probably throw-up when she wakes up. That’s a normal reaction to chloroform, you should have some crackers around here to settle her stomach.” Eve said as they quickly left his house.

Grav shuffled towards them, cognizant of the sleeping toddler on his shoulder. He continued to call out to them, but his words were lost as two buzzards took flight, one black and one white. Mut and Eve had to stop flying in their more obvious suits because people were beginning to notice. Settlers had stayed away thinking him to be the devil, but Grav still wondered how he had stayed hidden. He wasn’t exactly hiding, he was just in the middle of nowhere, and had been there for centuries, though currently there was a highway that divided his desert.

Grav sighed as he looked at the child in his arms. She didn’t deserve Mut and Eve’s drive to experiment. He wondered if the girl had even seen their true forms, but he doubted it. Mut and Eve probably grabbed and drugged her right away. He did have to wonder why they allowed the police to chase them when they could just jump from creature to creature or shape-shift. It would have been easy to carry the child off as giant eagles.

Grav tried to picture the encounter, Mut jumping the gun and grabbing the child in view of everyone, Eve cursing her as she hoisted the child over her shoulder and the two running and dodging as people tried to stop them. Math had decreed that they couldn’t shape-shift in front of humans anymore, thus they would have had to make sure no one was around. Grav sighed as he turned back to his slowly decaying house.

Faded green paint flecked from the side of the wooden structure, showing the bleached wood underneath. Rusted metal roofing deterred the rain from his one-story house. He would need to request an extension on his house and probably some reinforcement of the walls. If Mut and Eve were hoisting this responsibility on him, then he would need to actually do house work.

Grav sighed, pinching at his suit. “Why did I need to put this on if the girl is out?” he asked the air. She hadn’t even been awake to scream ‘Boogeyman’ at him. Trudging through the dirt back inside, itching at his suit as the threads made patterns under his skin. He really needed a new suit, maybe one like Eve and Mut’s, one that could shape-shift. They were Gen’s newest line of suits.

Placing the child on Mut’s cleared chair, Grav surveyed the well-lit room. He ran a hand over his face as he realized how much work he had. He didn’t dare take off the suit until after Jo had woken. Grav might be well read in the literary classics but he hadn’t brushed up on the elements and their chemical compounds. He never saw the point when he could just talk to Lem, the one who controls the elements, or Chem if he ever had a question. He would just have to trust Mut and Eve to have given her the right dosage. Leaning in close, Grav tried to tell if her coloring might have been off. If she didn’t wake by dinnertime, Grave was definitely calling in help.

Brushing a hand through the greasy hair on his head he set to work, child-proofing his house. Which pretty much meant, detaching the dirt from the ceiling by making it too heavy, and sticking his first-edition classics up there. Jo would have to be able to fly to get at them.

Next he started gathering up the garbage and moving it outside. He was able to clear out the kitchen, living room and bedroom in good order. He was reminded that his bedroom floor was made of wood with no carpet. Heaping all of the garbage in a pile that towered over his house, he made sure the gravity of each object attracted the objects around it and vice versa. This allowed for the garbage to stick together more solidly than if he had stuck them together with rubber cement. Stuffing newspaper into the cracks, he eased up on the attraction to allow good airflow and set fire to his garbage, he watched it a bit before heading inside. Windows facing towards the pile would allow him to watch the bonfire outside, incase it got too out of hand and caused a wild fire.

Closing the door behind himself, he checked to make sure the smoke wasn’t going to blow into the house. He doubted that would be good for Jo after she had been forced to breathe in chloroform. Picking her up, he moved her to his bed where she could sleep more comfortably.

Grav looked around, trying to see if he missed anything, not seeing anything he wondered if maybe he should vacuum or even wash the dishes. Sticking his head into his peeling kitchen, he glared a little at the dishes. They were only here because Grav enjoyed the task of eating; the various tastes and textures were taunts to his immortality and alien-ness to humanity. And if he didn’t have that hobby, he wouldn’t owe Eve who enjoyed cooking but not eating. He shook his finger at the dishes, “This is all your fault.”

Releasing the gravity holding the dish city together, he allowed the plastic dishes to come crashing down onto the floor. He smiled in triumph as dishes and particles of food bounced helplessly on the bright yellow linoleum floor. Cackling to himself, he kicked a few dishes for good measure. “That’s what I think of your cooking Eve!”

Hearing a groan from his bedroom, Grav leaned backwards to see if he could see Jo. She was trying to sit up, but like a newborn calf her arms weren’t supporting her weight. Going to her side, Grav made clucking noises. “Hey kiddo. Why don’t you lay down, two crazy ladies were being mean to you.” Grav pushed her gently down.

“Mommy?” Jo asked. Still trying to sit up.

“No, it’s just Uncle Grav.” Grav said. His eyes widened as he started to search for a bucket, as Jo grew very pale and started to open her mouth. Grav did not want vomit on his favorite cowboy sheets.

Finding a bowl with sour milk crusted to the bottom, Grav flipped it upside down to empty what he could, and shoved it under Jo’s chin. Instantly stomach acid mixed with chunks of half-digested food spurted from her mouth. Grav gagged a little, being reminded of a deteriorating suit.

“Keep that under your chin,” Grav urged as he ran to the kitchen. Grabbing up his cleanest towel and filling up a cup that only needed one rinse to get the dirt out, Grav had both outstretched to Jo as she tried to stay upright and vomit into the bowl. “You know, you’re the most considerate person right now and you’ve barely learned to talk. Good on you.” Grav said, as he crouched down, cup and towel still outstretched.

Jo finally stopped vomiting, though the bowl was almost to it limit. Wiping her mouth with the towel and exchanging the bowl with a cup of water, Grav moved Jo off of his bed. “I bet you would like to sleep on actual sheets and not a naked mattress, huh?”

Jo watched Grav with half-lidded brown eyes as she tried to drink the water. The cup was a little too big for her and most of the water ended up in her lap. And like most kids, she looked at her lap and cried. Grav tried making shushing noises as his hands fluttered around her, not positive on how to comfort her. She started hiccupping, and Grav wondered if more vomit was on its way.

Placing the full bowl on the floor, he picked up another, this one much cleaner. Grabbing the cup away from her he shoved the bowl in her hands. “There, see bowl for your vomit.” His head worked back and forth as he searched for a way to calm her down. Seeing his cell phone, he lunged for it. Holding the four down he prayed Mut or Eve would pick up. He didn’t care that Francis the Bigfoot was finally noticing Maggie the Bigfoot instead of his science experiments. Such things paled in comparison to the crisis that was happening here. There was a crying child that didn’t seem to understand him, he didn’t do crying. How was that fair?

Getting the voice mail, Grav kept turning his head to shush the little girl. “Please calm down! It’s not that bad.” Jo paused in her crying to stare at him. “What? Do I have something on my face?” Grav touched his face, and he groaned. There were holes in his face where bundles of threads were swaying around in happiness, egging on their brethren to push through the face. He heard a giggle, as Jo reached towards him small hand grasping towards the threads. “Oh thank god you think this is funny.” He unzipped his suit and allowed the threads free to curl around Jo, at least if she vomited on the threads he could transport it out.

He continued to try Eve and Mut, but not as frenzied as before. All he was paying attention to were the little giggles and fewer and fewer vomiting noises as he allowed the threads to play with the little girl. A mouse thumped against the window as the wind picked up a bit. Grav looked towards the sky, searching for the hawk that was careless with its food.

It took Grav hours of dialing and redialing before Eve picked up. He had almost called Gen to see if she would take the child. She was adorable, but Grav knew he didn’t have the qualifications to take care of her, he had to keep strict watch on his emotional state to make sure he didn’t accidently release humanity into space, or worse the other animals and plants. There was just something about forced cannibalism that didn’t strike Grav’s fancy.

“What?” Eve asked.

“When are you coming to get Jo?” Grav asked, his threads rocking Jo gently as she slept.

“I thought I already explained this. You are taking care of her, but you’ll need to keep your suit on, she screamed the first time she saw me and Mut in our suits.”

“You showed yourself to her?”

“Yes, her screams attracted her parents and we had to leave without her. She was fighting us too much.” Eve said. “Is that it?”

“But Eve you need to take her! I just barely got her to calm down and that was only because she finds my threads fascinating.” Grav said. He glanced over at Jo, his house didn’t even have a proper bathroom, he couldn’t make her go outside. “I don’t even have a bathroom.”

“So?” Eve asked.

“Is it Grav?” Mut screamed in the background.

Grav rubbed the bridge of his long nose as he listened to Mut and Eve grappling over the phone. “Hi Grav, is Jo awake? Did she vomit?” Mut won.

“Yes, now when are you going to take her? I have books stuck to the ceiling so she doesn’t damage them.” Grav asked.

“Oh Grav, we told you, you’re taking care of her. She won’t be found with you, you’re on the other side of the country from her home, and you were born to take care of children.”

“No, I was created to regulate the gravitational pull of objects, not take care of a child. I live out here for a reason, Mut, it’s to stay away from people!”

“Fine.” Mut said. “Give us a couple weeks to find someone to take care of her. Maybe we can get a human to be a surrogate.”

Grav thanked Mut and hung up the phone. Leaning against a dented bookshelf, Grav smiled as his threads made a nest around Jo, trying to protect her from the experiment filled future ahead of her. As Grav watched the sun set he wondered what type of family Jo would be given too. He hoped that they wouldn’t get Lect to take care of her; he was as unpredictable as the lightening in thunderstorms that he liked generating. He allowed the threads that connected him to everything bring the sounds of a symphony into the bedroom. He hummed along as he continued to watch over Jo.

Days slowly turned into weeks, which turned into months as Mut *continued* to search for a surrogate. Grav had to admit that he was getting rather attached to Jo, but it was still not safe for her to stay with him. Though he had to admit that his house had never been cleaner.

The renovations to the house came along easily enough to where Jo had her own toilet and bedroom filled with toys and pictures. Grav had tracked down Jo’s parents, but hadn’t gotten a hold of them. He watched as they worried about their daughter, and nationwide search looked for the girl. Grav felt bad about not letting the parents know that Jo was alright and where she was, but then he would be dragged into this whole mess, he would have to go outside and confront people.

Messy, emotional people. Grav could barely handle a little girl, but not emotional parents on top of that. Though Grav had to say that Jo was quite adorable. Her rosy cheeks and toothy grin as she scurried around the house. He didn’t let her out much, mostly because it was a pain to unlock the door and he was pretty sure coyotes could carry her off very easily.

Grav sipped at his dust free encrusted glass as he watched an animated ballerina on the screen. Jo was cooing at the television as the ballerina twirled and pranced. She had tried to imitate the show, but had ended up on her behind before giving up after a while.

Grav’s eyes shifted towards his phone as it began to vibrate against the coffee table. Picking up the phone, he grunted.

“Have you started getting her used to heights?” Eve asked.

“Have you found Jo a home?”

“You’re taking care of her just fine and it makes this experiment easier. We don’t have to continuously invade your space.” Eve said.

“Well I guess that is all right. Why do I need to acclimate Jo? Isn’t this already in her DNA?”

“Yes and no. Fear can be a powerful thing and we would rather nip it in the bud.” Eve said, “Now get on it. We’ll be over in a couple weeks.”

Grav sighed as he tossed his phone into a net of threads. Watching Jo, he worried his lip. “Hopefully I don’t drop you.” Grav waited until the movie was over before unlocking his nine locks and unsealing the door. His frown deepened as he forced himself into the expanse of nowhere.

It was easier than Grav thought to get Jo accustomed to floating a few feet off the ground. She rather enjoyed it actually. Tackling his threads was her way of saying up. He would hold her up, and increase the gravity of certain objects to propel her forward or backwards. He sometimes wondered if this was how it felt to teach someone to ride a bike. It felt rather good.

The only thing Grav had to watch for was Jo’s new want to fling herself off things. This, as any caregiver knew, was a safety risk for the child. In response, Jo had her own contingent of threads that followed her everywhere, even if Grav wasn’t in the room.

Eve and Mut would visit on occasion, bringing new supplies to restock the growing kitchen. Grav had to expand his house several times as Jo slowly grew into adulthood. She learned and knew the world through Grav, Mut and Eve. Jo had continuously complained that they were keeping her trapped, but they would brush it off. Telling her that if the world found her the governments and scientists would want to study her.

Well, not completely true.

They would probably want to track the Concepts down and lock them away for study, or just lock her up into an insane asylum.

On very rare occasions, Grav did take her to observe people. Not necessarily interact with, but observe. From way up in the clouds, it was rather enjoyable to watch as people scurried around. Grav could manipulate how close clouds were to the ground, and he and Jo would just sit and watch them. It was kind of a game of hide-and-seek, where if someone looked up Grav and Jo would quickly duck back into the cloud. Or if a plane flew overhead, they would wrap themselves in the cloud, and wait.

Grav wondered what he would do when Jo finally had to go. Maybe go back to watching his movies, and molding into his chair. But his house was so much bigger now. It had whispers and emotions that Grav didn’t know if he could take on by himself. Well Jo would need a house up here, Grav had been thinking about moving. He was starting to get neighbors. Yes, it was definitely time to move.

As Jo neared the age of 21, she was getting more and more stir-crazy. Grav had to keep her under perpetual surveillance to keep her from running away. It was grating on both their nerves. It happened again tonight while he had been watching one of the new shows on NBC. Sometimes getting free cable was great.

His threads shivered, as a window opened upstairs. Not bothering to get up, Grav pushed himself through the threads and remolded himself in Jo’s bedroom. Her dark blue walls imitated the sky right before full darkness. The books and movies lining the walls gave her passions away, fantasy, photography, language. It was all there, ready to read and inspire.

“Jo.” Grav said.

Her shoulders slumped as she fell back into her room. “Ah come on, just one night. All I need is one night and I will stop sneaking out.”

“That’s what you said the last time when I actually let you.” Grav said.

Rolling to her stomach, Jo groaned. “Really? You’re going to keep me couped up? I know I’m a science experiment, but I don’t interact with any of the other experiments. I’m beginning to think that there aren’t any others.”

Grav sat on her bed, “Francis is very real, and even more hermit-ish than I am.” His threads started to flow around the room, checking the objects for danger to Jo. “If you are a success, then Eve and Mut have a ton of people that are lined up to join you. Which reminds me, you are old enough to move to the clouds permanently. Isn’t that great?”

Jo shot up, her back making a ‘u’, “Really? Does that mean I can go anywhere by myself?”

Grav’s threads drooped a little, “Well yes. I was going to ask if you wanted this house or your very own. Books surprisingly don’t do well when they are up in the air surrounded by precipitation.”

Jo rolled to her feet, “Doesn’t Francis have that machine that hardens clouds into viable structures? Couldn’t I use that?”

“Where did you hear about that?”

“One of the nights you were talking to Mut and Eve.” Jo tapped her finger to her lip as she fell into her purple office chair. “When do I get to meet the other Concepts?”

“Eve and Mut don’t think that would be a good idea.”

“Do you always do what Eve and Mut say?”

“Not all the time, sometimes I do what Physics says.” Grav tapered off, his threads drooping further. His self-forced isolation did limit his interaction with the other Concepts. Really he only heard stories about them, nothing much more than that. Physics, Mut and Eve were the only ones who visited.

“I’ve never met Physics, he’s your maker yeah?”

“Yeah, and you have surely met Physics. He comes by at least once a week.”

“No I am always with Mut and Eve. The only time I get to interact with actual people.”

“Surely that’s not right.” Grav muttered to himself. His threads slithered and grappled with one another. Standing he started shuffling towards the door, pausing he said, “Don’t try to sneak out. I try to get Francis over so he can teach you how to use his machine.”

Jo nodded as she watched him curiously. Grav continued down the stairs, conflicted about Jo not meeting Physics. He had asked about the additions to the house, and Grav had told him the truth. He now found it weird that Physics hadn’t ever seemed more curious about it. Maybe he thought that Grav had finally gone off the deep end and was seeing people and interacting. That would explain why Physics watched his threads, always a dead give away to his emotional and mental state. Since they hadn’t acted up much, Physics must not be too worried about Grav neglecting his duties.

Sliding into his worn chair, he was happy to find that Jo didn’t try to escape again that night.

It took a week before Mut and Eve were sure Jo was ready. The party was small and in the clouds. They seemed more jittery than usual. Mut’s true form was morphing faster than usual, and Eve wasn’t changing at all, not even the slow pace she usually changed at. Grav knew something was wrong, but didn’t know how to confront them about it.

Of course, he could be over thinking this. Something could be wrong with Francis. That had to be it, Francis was probably having one of his hermit phases. Which would be a problem, since they needed to have him explain how his Gùtǐ worked. Grav didn’t understand where Francis’ fascination for the Chinese language came from, but it did lend to some interesting direct translations.

Grav busied himself around the near spotless house as he waited for Mut, Eve and Francis to arrive. They were on the late side, but that wasn’t anything weird. Jo sat on her black suede chair, suitcases lined neatly along the wall. Her hands rubbed together as her head swiveled around the room.

“Do you think my parents ever think of me?”

Grav’s threads wrapped around the plate he was holding as his hands loosened their grip. “I bet they do. Probably never stopped hoping.” They didn’t talk about her parents often, though on her birthday, Grav would observe them with her.

“I know why I can’t really see them, but sometimes I wonder.”

“I know.” He said. “I didn’t talk to Eve and Mut for a week after they dropped you on my doorstep.”

Jo giggled. “No you didn’t.”

Grav smiled at Jo, “Yeah, I was calling them every ten minutes. It wasn’t safe here for you.”

“Probably safer than out there.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I watch the news.”

“That doesn’t say anything about the world. It is wondrous and magical. Just a little chaotic.”

“Then why don’t you ever go out by yourself.”

The threads twirled around Grav, “I’m connected to everyone, why would I need to go outside?”

“What about the other Concepts? Don’t they wonder about you?”

“No. They know the danger.” He muttered.

“What danger? You’re the most kind person in the world.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m not dangerous.”

Jo laid a hand on his shoulder, “Promise me that when I leave you won’t continue to lock yourself up here?”

He looked away, scanning for a blemish on the plate. “I can’t do that. I can’t forgive myself if I harmed another species.”

“What are you even talking about?” Jo asked.

He was saved by a pounding on the door. Unlocking the nine rusted locks, Grav stepped aside for Mut, Eve and a hunched Francis to come through. Francis looked everything like what a Bigfoot should look like, except he had on tan slacks and a tie. He stared nervously at the threads that cloaked Grav, before sweeping his gaze to Jo. Holding out a hand, he said, “P-pleasure to m-meet you.”

Jo smiled as she pumped Francis’ hand up and down. “Oh it really is a pleasure. I’ve heard so much about you.” Standing she slapped him on the back for good measure, “Us experiments need to stick together after all.”

“Experiments?” Came from the door.

Grav turned his head, and smiled. “Hey Phys, glad you could make it.”

He gestured for Physics to come inside, but he didn’t move. “What do you mean experiments? Mutation, Evolution explain.” Phys strode in, tailcoat billowing. He was the most human looking of all the concepts, Grav theorized because he was one of the first of the concepts that Math created. He didn’t need a suit, because of his similarities to humans. He only had to wear clothing from head to toe and foundation on his face, to hide the equations and that morphed and moved around his body.

Mut shrank behind Eve. “We were taking an initiative.” Eve said, barely above a whisper.

“What? You mean this wasn’t approved?” Grav asked, moving his threads so they made a small barrier between Phys and Jo. Francis ducked behind it too, gripping the Gùtǐ to his chest.

“No Grav, this was an unapproved experiment.” Phys said soothingly. “I should have known from the beginning, but I thought you were just making up people.”

Grav was a little hurt. “Why?”

“You were lonely, we all could see it. These two,” he gestured to Eve and Mut, “were probably trying to make you feel better by giving you a pet to take care of.”

“She’s not a pet.” Grav said, threads thrashed and stood rigidly. “Jo, we’re leaving.”

“Grav don’t do this. Just let her go, she’s just a human.” Phys said.

“Isn’t that enough? We only regulate this world, nothing else.” Grav asked.

“Exactly. We shouldn’t be messing with humans.”

“But we alter other animals so they can evolve.” Eve said, stepping in front of Grav. “Why can’t we help humans evolve, we did centuries ago. If Mut and I hadn’t experimented all those years ago, humans wouldn’t be where they are today.”

“Humans weren’t meant to fly!” Phys said. Equations were starting to roam his face. “We saw this years ago!”

“I’m not the first?” Jo asked.

“No, that’s where angels come from. They grew out of control and we had to euthanize them.” Eve said. Her form was slowly shifting to a bigger form.

Grav moved along his threads and made sure Jo was blocked from Phys. “But she’s different, Jo can make it.”

“But what about the future flyers? They won’t be as lucky.” Phys said. Stepping forward, trying to get a better shot at Jo.

Grav’s threads had gone still, he was acutely aware of the gravity around him. “No she won’t. I’ll prove it to you.” Wrapping Jo in the threads, he disappeared from the house, the last thing he heard was a “No!” He couldn’t discern the voice.

The burning colors of twilight blinded Grav as he unwrapped Jo. Huge clouds surrounded them. Grav sighed, “We’ll have to keep moving. Maybe even separate for a time. No, that won’t work. The other Concepts might find you! What then, we don’t know that they are on your side. Why didn’t Eve and Mut tell me from the beginning that they didn’t have permission?”

“Because then you wouldn’t have gone with it.” Jo supplied. Her arms were wrapped around herself, shielding herself form the cold.

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes I do, I have been living with you for the majority of my life. Grav, you don’t like to go against Phys. I could see that even without meeting him. Though he is a rather huge dick.” Jo said.

“But why did they have to lie to me?”

“Do I need to repeat myself?” Jo asked.

Grav felt winded. “I don’t want to be that person though.”

“But you’re not a person.”

“I know.” Grav felt small, smaller than he had ever felt before.

Jo placed her hand on his shoulder. “Don’t worry, we’ll get through this.” Bringing her hand up, she coughed a little.

Grav’s head snapped up as he grabbed her face in his hands. “What’s wrong?”

“Just need to get some oxygen, been a while since I’ve been up here.” Jo assured him.

“No, no.” Grav looked around wildly until he saw her. Liquid to gas to solid, perpetually reacting strode Chem. “Please. Please stop this Chem. It will work. Just wait.”

Chem held up her hand, as she got closer, Jo started to cough and gag.

“Stop it! Stop it!” Grav’s threads lashed out, wrapping around Chem’s hand as he flung her away from them. His threads were in a frenzy and grav didn’t notice the loosening of the elements.

Chem’s red eyes widened as she backed away. “This has to be done, Grav. You know it.”

“No it doesn’t!” The threads gathered together and speared towards Chem. “You will leave us alone.”

“Grav!”

“It’s all right Jo. I’ll protect you.” Grav said without turning to look at her. “Everything will be all right.”

“No it won’t Grav. Look at what’s happening around you!” Phys shouted, appearing in a cloud of ‘E=mc2’s. “You are losing control!”

Grav laughed, “If I could raise a child without losing control, I think I can handle protecting Jo.” He directed threads to ward off Phys.

“Grav! Help me!”

Grav whipped around, looking towards Jo who was barely holding onto a clump of threads. Her hair floated around her, she had lost all gravity. “No, no, no.”

“Grav calm down. We can talk about this.” Phys soothed. “We can maybe let this little experiment go forward.”

“But she’s an abomination!” Chem said.

Phys shushed her, “Compared to keeping the rest of the world in tact, I’ll risk letting an abomination live.”

“She’s not an abomination!” Grav said.

“Okay, okay.” Phys held up his hands, trying to sooth him.

Grav tried wrapping threads around Jo, but they kept falling away. Black tears, ran down his face, “I can’t lose you.”

Jo smiled at him, “You’re not going to lose me. Remember you are always in control.” Her fear ridden eyes gave her away slightly, as she grasped and re-grasped the threads. “Just don’t let go.”

“I’ll try.” Grav tried to sooth the roiling emotions within his gut, but he couldn’t focus. All that focus he had built up wasn’t there, and the fear of that gnawed and destroyed and fortifications of focus he could muster. “I can’t do it.”

“Yes you can, you’ve done it so many times.” Phys said, stepping closer. “Let me assist.”

“I should do this on my own.”

“But isn’t that what got you in this mess.”

“No. Other’s got me into this mess.” Grav said, eyes unfocusing. He was falling, and Jo was forever going to be in the clouds. That was better than Chem choking and smothering her with toxic gases. She would be free. Wasn’t that better than being tethered to him. “Be free Jo.” He whispered, as the threads released her hands.

She screamed, reaching towards him as she floated passed the atmosphere and into deep space. She could finally live among the stars.

“You did the right thing.” Phys said, stepping up and putting his hand on Grav’s shoulder.

Grav looked with dead eyes. “I have truly learned something about myself. I was never made for company.” With that, Grav disappeared with a slither of his threads, returning home.

Mut, Eve and Francis surrounded him, asking where Jo was, what had happened, and if he was all right. He pushed them away and locked his nine rusty locks. Settling himself into his molded chair, Grav put in his favorite movie. Realizing that monotony was the only thing for him, and anything else was suicide for those around him.

He turned up the volume to drown out the pounding on his door.