

Gifts I Have Given

I could have stopped with a sphere of compacted dust.

I could have stopped with barren rock surrounded by barren sea.

I could have put that sphere a bit closer to the star, so that the sea boiled until it vanished.

I could have put that sphere a bit further away from the star, so that the sea became an eternal sheet of ice.

Yes, the orbit of that sphere was my first work of perfection.

And of course, I did not need to bother with a moon.

That entirely superfluous ornament might well have been added to the moons of Jupiter.

A bauble, waxing and waning, from slender crescent to half-circle to gently radiant orb: to what purpose?

Aaaahhhh, so that by pulling the sea, the sea could breathe. The tide flows in, the tide flows out, cleansing, nurturing: the first steady heartbeat.

I could have stopped with the unprecedented complexity of one-celled bits of green able to turn sunlight into sugar. Wasn't that miracle enough?

I could have stopped with the lacy frond of a fern, able to scatter spores—microcosms of information in a tiny black speck—onto the fertile ground.

I could have stopped—I could have called it quits—with the invention of clams.

I could have stopped with the ingenuity of a feather.

I could have stopped with a brain clever enough to hunt, passionate enough to mate, and lazy enough to drowse in the African sun.

But teeth and claws were not my ultimate goal.

I still had, in my apron pocket, Friendship, and Compassion, and Love.

What was I to do with Music, as unnecessary as the moon?

And Mathematics, the key with which to unlock so many of my mysteries.

Might not some creature want to say to his companions, "Let me tell you a Story."

And so I took a great risk, and made a brain perhaps too clever.

I made a hand perhaps too dexterous.

For the hand picked up a club, a sword, a rifle,

And the brain forgot friendship, forgot compassion, forgot love,

And remembered rather the ways of snakes.

Oh, so many gifts I gave them, hoping they might become, and become, and become far more than what they had been.

As I set no limits on my own creation, so I set no limits on theirs.

From a song at dusk to a symphony, from notches in wood to a book with chapters, from plucking berries to harvesting a field of golden grain, they were invited to outgrow themselves, generation after generation.

Beyond the mere tussle of mating, I gave them the magic of falling in love.

Beyond howls in the night, I gave them a soul and then gave their souls a hunger for worship, in a shrine or a mosque or a church or a synagogue of their own choosing.

Beyond sudden and empty death, I gave them a reverence for ancestors, and a belief in eternity which gives them peace.

Such simple things as air to breathe, water to drink, and a firm earth to stand on, are gifts quickly forgotten, until I take away any one of them.

Shall I take away as well the gift of courage, the gift of hope?

What practical necessity required that I bestowed upon them eyes that savored beauty in a mountain, in a rose, in a woman's face?

Wherefore the gift of memory? Might not a mother's voice, a boyhood prank, just disappear?

Wherefore shall they fill a room with laughter? Wherefore shall they raise their voices and sing? Are these not gifts utterly superfluous?

Gifts quickly forgotten, are soon remembered when snatched away.

Let them wander a poisoned Earth when they have little left but the moon.

I do not wish it; they wish it upon themselves.

Then, perhaps, those who survive the centuries of hunger and strife

Will savor anew the gifts of Friendship and Compassion and Love.

Perhaps, they will thank the sun and thank the wind, and dip their cups that they might taste the salty waters of a sacred sea.

Perhaps they will become creatures no longer apart from Creation.

If so, then shall we continue our journey together

Toward what they Might Become,

Were they to bestow their multitude of gifts among each other,

On what could have been merely a sphere of compacted dust.