

# The Signal of the Second Spring.

**Supernova1987**

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## The Signal of the Second Spring.

Anitya sat on the bridge, watching carp play with the seeds she dropped with her tiny hands. At four years old, she had the grace of a dancer seen all too long ago, perhaps imagined. The seeds left her hands in graceful loops that traced patterns across the air between bridge and water. She sat, as always, with her hair draped across her left shoulder. When she saw Mother enter the garden, she quickly adjusted it, placing it neatly above her head. She rose and smiled at Mother then giggled slightly as something fell and tickled her nose.

There were signs that autumn was coming. Maple leaves had begun to drift down and float upon the water. It sent a shiver down Mothers' spine to watch and feel the cooling air. To think of winter was a terrible thought but a certainty they knew must come at one time; a winter without end; a winter with no spring. Somewhere out on the slopes of the mountain, a flock of birds were startled by something moving on the lower slopes. Mother guessed it was another bear. They were daring to come nearer now the food was becoming scarcer. She didn't understand this. Surely there were nuts and autumn fruits. Colours were changing on the mountains, golden and warm. The garden reflected it back paying the landscape its respect and compliments.

She shuddered in the cool air. The signal was late again, each time reducing, each time causing Mother to feel anxiety she had promised to ignore. Each cycle became longer and the questions needed to be invoked. Anitya didn't mind it though. The questions for her were anticipation and excitement. The process of renewal in the garden was a tremendous thing to watch. She didn't understand the long hard winter and had not experienced it yet; cold beyond cold beyond cold; nothing and darkness. Father worked patiently to remotely adjust the relays but there wasn't enough power to fix them all at once. As each fell off more rapidly he spent more time away from the garden.

Anitya rose and ran towards Mother, running her small fingers along the bamboo that shaded the path. Mother dragged herself from the worry and sat down in front of the sand garden. The girl had excitement in her eyes and would want to speak. She smiled and gestured to the seat beside her where Anitya bounced over and knelt down. She had her own questions.

“Mother did you see the birds? Did you see them? There must have been at least fifty flying out of the trees. What should we think caused them to fly that way?” She bounced on her knees to mark and exaggerate the speech, making Mother smile and hold her still. Those eyes of wonder were always a safe refuge against the troubles of the world.

“It was probably another big bear chasing a squirrel, but you must not wonder about such things. You know we must never leave the garden. To leave would be to never return. This place is made for us. A thing the birds and the bears do not have.” Anitya looked dissatisfied. She was always peeking out beyond the stone garden, waiting for something to happen on the mountain while Mother constantly steered her back to her contemplations.

They sat in silence for a long time. Watching more leaves fall from the maples. Anitya wriggled next to her, unable to contain her anticipation of what would happen next. Everything was changing.

A cool wind dragged its fingers through the Wisteria, spraying flowers onto the sand garden. Mother pulled her cardigan to cover them both as they sat. The light was beginning to fade and Father suddenly arrived in the garden. He brought a flame from the stove and lit the lanterns. Without speaking, he came and sat beside them. He was tired but something in his eyes had changed; had lightened. He looked into Anitya's eyes and kissed her forehead brushing her hair back down across her left shoulder. She giggled looking guiltily at Mother who remained waiting for Father to speak. He knows something, she thought. I just know he does. He wouldn't have lit the lanterns otherwise.

Finally he turned to face Mother, "There is another cluster approaching, enough for many years more and then I cannot say. It means more time but we will have to wait and watch the first snows before it can give enough to fix all of the relays." He was running his fingers through Anitya's hair and she bounced off the seat to dart playfully away from his reach.

Mother closed her eyes and smiled inside. All the worry of the last few days began to fade. She rose and walked back inside announcing loudly, "Then we shall need to keep warm." As she walked away she heard him begin the questions of remembrance once more. He always did that, starting before she was ready for her part. Perhaps his intention was to teach her words to Anitya. She hurried inside and gathered several thick blankets and a hat for Anitya. By the time she returned he had finished the introduction and was moving to the first questions.

"What is a King worth?"

Anitya bubbled and glowed with happiness. She knew this one well and always enjoyed telling it. Standing importantly to mimic the weight of the story she would tell she raised her chin and imitated her Father's serious expression. She began the answer.

"Even a King must die,  
and come to realise that although his banner flies,  
all his worth is bound  
in how his body nourishes the ground.  
A king is worth the fruit of trees."

The garden grew lighter for a moment and then faded quickly to dusk. More leaves were falling and the maple leaves were now all a deep red and falling fast. A fox barked not far from the garden and Anitya jumped up and down. Father paid no heed. He turned to Mother to ask the second question.

She made her face a stern one and shouted out, "How powerful is an army?" This time Father answered. Standing tall in front of them, he spoke loudly and with force sending an echo out into the valley.

“Even armies fall.

Leaving nothing but metal shards and bones and clothes,  
for sure a short memorial to those,  
that come to pass  
but trampled underfoot to feed the grass.”

Darkness fell quicker than any of them expected but the stone lanterns did not go out in the wind. The trees were bare now and birds rustled around at the foot of the bamboos to find a warm place. Father sat down and Anitya stood to ask the next question. She paused for a moment until Mother drew the figure of a roof with fingers out of sight of Father’s eyes.

Anitya barked at them, “How great is a city?” Mother stood and answered now pulling her blanket tighter around her neck.

“Even cities crumble.

For as much as they show mastery of nature,  
concrete is attacked by tiny creatures.  
Buildings shrink to rocks and holes,  
That once again small insects hold.”

The wind calmed and the air was still. In the light of the lanterns, Anitya could see her breath for the first time. She was puzzled and pulled her blanket tight moving back to Father for warmth. Father saw her worry but moved on to the next question. He stood, surprising her and shouted the question loudly sending birds flying from the garden.

“How long does a book last?” Anitya did not have time to sit down. She dropped her blanket, standing a little shocked and barked the answer without thinking.

“Even books decay.

Pages filled with knowledge turned to dust and blown away.  
On high winds they play,  
Feeding grass on mountains steep,  
pages grown for goats to eat.”

Mother gathered the blanket Anitya had dropped. Father smiled and took his daughter's hand. She looked as if she might cry for a moment, not understanding how this game was affecting the world. Never had the garden looked so cold and uninviting and now white flakes of snow were beginning to fall, settling on the frozen surface of the stream. They went inside where the fire was already lit and warming the house. Father stood in the centre of the room and gazed out at the snow. He smiled, nervously, as Mother came to join him. “It will get worse before it gets better,” he whispered in her ear. She smiled at him and whispered back, “Its so good to see the snow again. I have missed this even though it makes me shake with fear.”

Father's smile faded and indicated that it was her turn to speak. Mother stood again to attention snapping Anitya out of her trance as she watched the snow.

“How does an idea endure?” This time Father answered, not shouting as loud as he had in the open.

“Even ideas fade.

Cared for and nurtured, purity is diluted and washed.

Rolling out to oceans of humanity,

Tainted and polluted with every twist of the sea.

Challenged and dissolving clearly.”

A blizzard started to whistle around the rafters, making the house creak a little. Anitya moved closer to the fire, she had never seen anything this powerful before. Snow billowed around the windows and now covered the red carpet of maple leaves. She had forgotten her place and a sharp clearing of the throat from Father brought her back to stand in the centre. Mother could see that she was shaking now and yearned to tell her that everything would be alright. She knew the rules of the questions of remembrance, how important it was for the small girl to remember them. Her eyes were watering, but she stood still and shouted the question.

“What value is the earth?” Mother did not pause but rushed straight in with her answer, desperate to hold her child.

“Even the earth dries.

Turned to stone and desert where once farmers tried.

Changed by hunger, drought and heat.

Fields wither forests retreat.

Mountains leveled in defeat.”

Over the roof the wind howled suddenly causing a loud thump. A stone from the chimney stack dropped and fell to the fire sending sparks into the room and Anitya ran squealing behind the hall posts to hide. Father retrieved the stone and cleaned the ashes from the hearth. Mother ran to her and held her, lifting her back to the centre of the room. Both Mother and Father knew the last three questions had to be answered by Anitya.

When he thought that she was calm enough, Father asked, “How eternal is the air?” Even though she was shaken Anitya stood tall and seemed to recover. As if in recognition, the wind outside began to calm.

“Even the air thins.

Burned and poisoned as the cosmos rains in.

All will die save hardy small things.

Blown away on stellar wind,

to melting ice on planets twinned.”

The sky outside was becoming brighter and the snow had turned to rain, melting the ice as it filled the small stream in the garden. Mother watched as the warmth began to return and the first birds were singing again. The landscape outside was no longer a tundra of drifting snow and ice. She turned to smile at Father, who was nodding and smiling back. Anitya looked confused. She looked from one to the other but they did not share their private conversation.

Mother asked, standing tall “Is not the Sun eternal?” Anitya smiled. She remembered this better than the others because it had never made sense to her. Didn’t the sun always rise eventually? She went out in the mornings and it was always there.

“Even the sun will burst.

Wash out its fire across the worlds it held so dearly.

Every atom smashed and glowing clearly,

mingling with other ice and dust,

one day to find another star it must.”

Leaves were emerging from the Maples now; large buds unfolding. Mother had seen the stream return to its normal level. In the warm morning sunshine, the carp broke the surface chasing the first of the year’s insects. She opened the doors to let in the fresh air as Father put out the last of the embers in the fire. When he was finished, he turned and faced Anitya, their daughter whom they had created outside of the rules they had been set. She was Anitya, the impermanent one. One day she would be grown and ready to take care of the world they lived in, but for now she was the final piece in the snapshot. Without her they would not continue in this darkening universe. Father walked forwards and whispered in her ear, “Does not the universe last forever?” Anitya smiled. She went to sleep at night with this one in her head.

“Even the universe will die.

Rules and bonds frayed and every element will retire.

No more the stellar fire.

All will change, spread out and reduce.

All Kings and cities, stars and sun turned to cooling soup.”

In the Kitchen Mother was preparing a hot soup for dinner. Anitya sat on the bridge under the blossoms that overhung the stream. With graceful and growing hands, she spread the seeds across the stream for the fish to chase. Outside of the garden, the mountainside was filled with life and beyond it, the world carried on its turning as before. Outside the world, the stars shone and the universe was complete. Outside the Universe, the small, dark, egg shaped mass that contained, it drifted onwards. Its atoms and circuits were shielded from the inevitable decay around. It drifted through the warm brown soup of what remained of the real universe. Lazily it moved further into a large, dense cluster of particles, channeling every ounce of energy it could. Father smiled adjusting and repairing the relays as they moved in and out of alignment. Not yet, he thought.

Not yet.

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King  
worth?

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and come to realise that although his banner flies,  
all his worth is bound  
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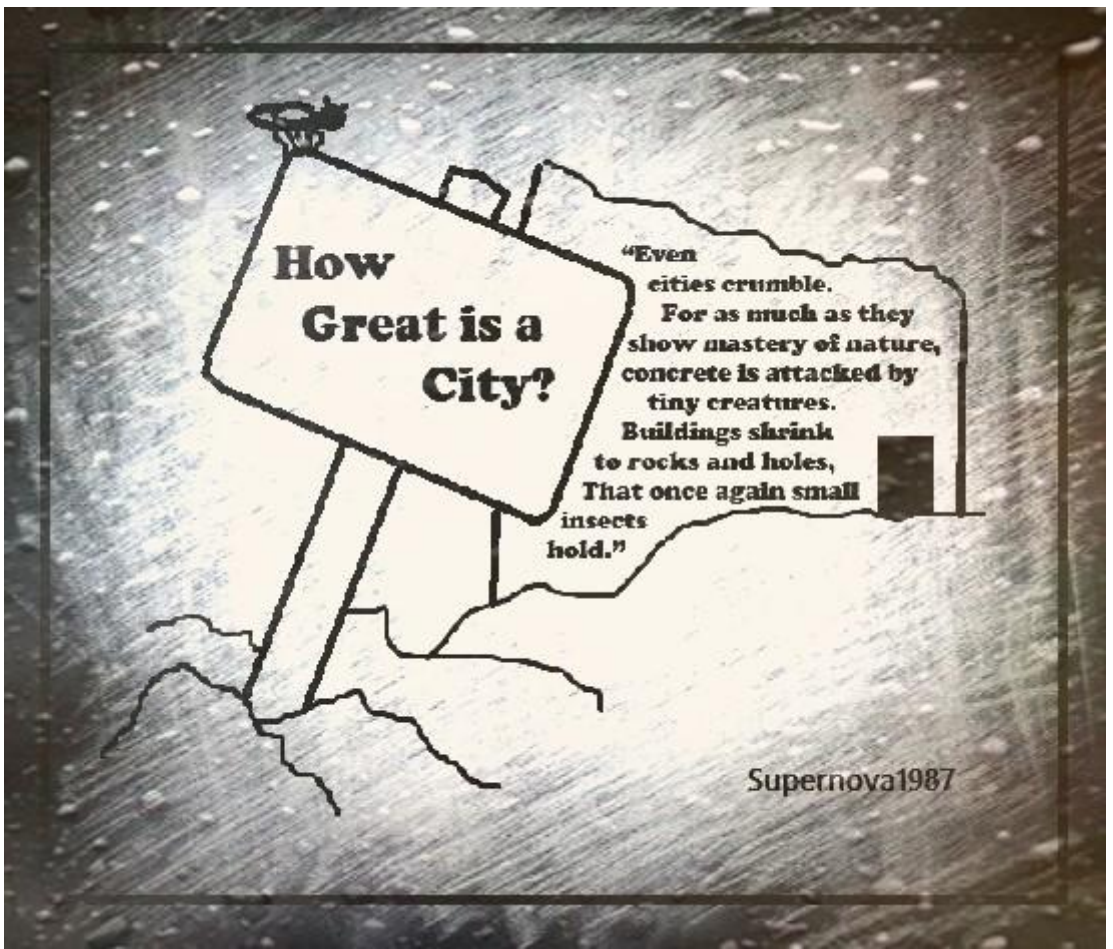
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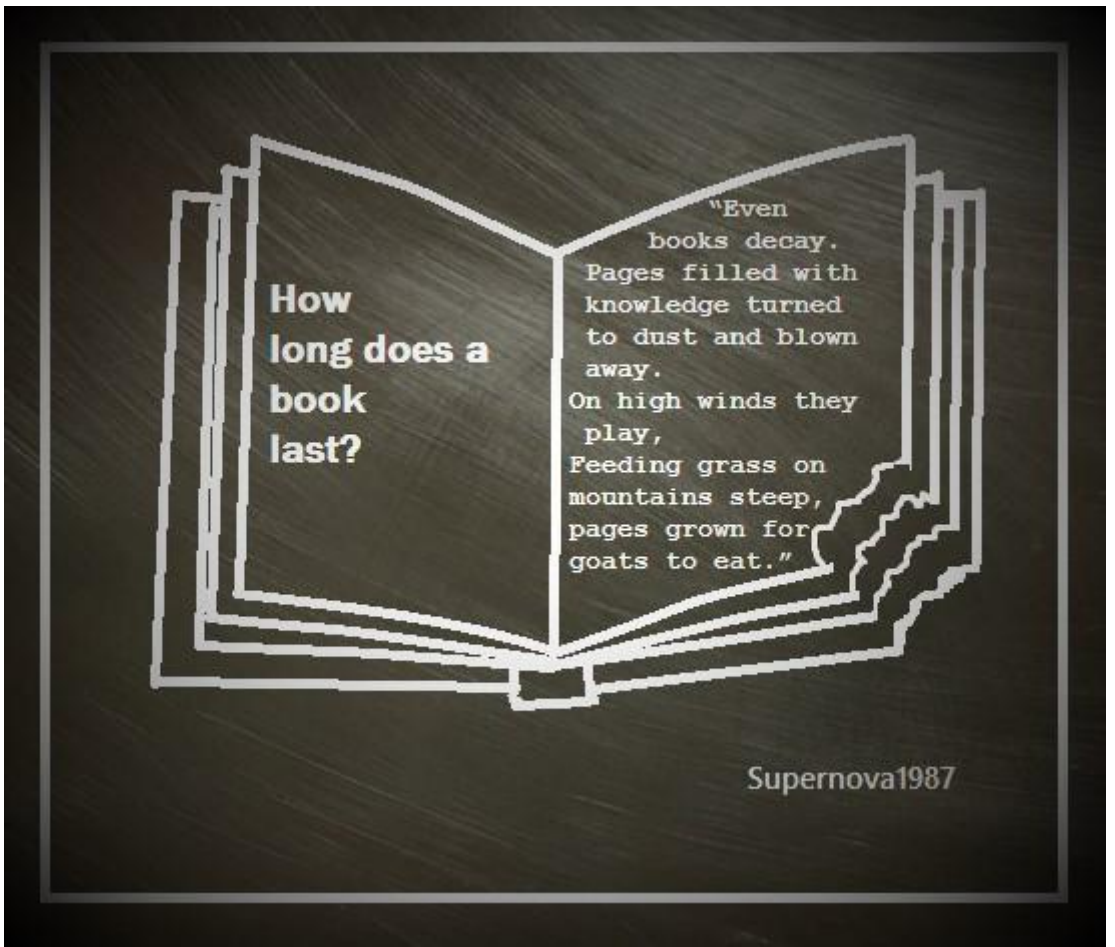


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"How long does a book last?"

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**How does an idea endure?**

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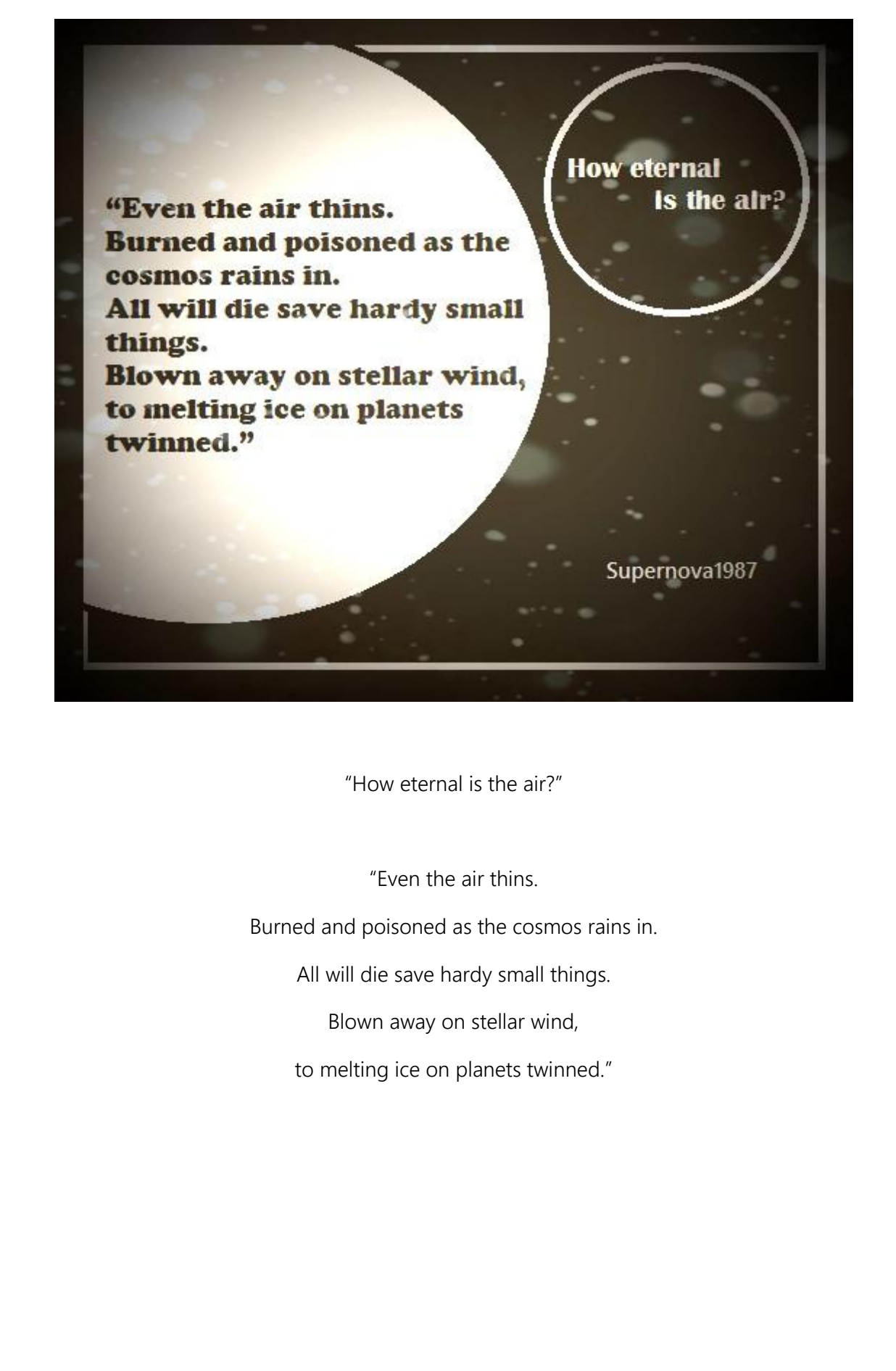
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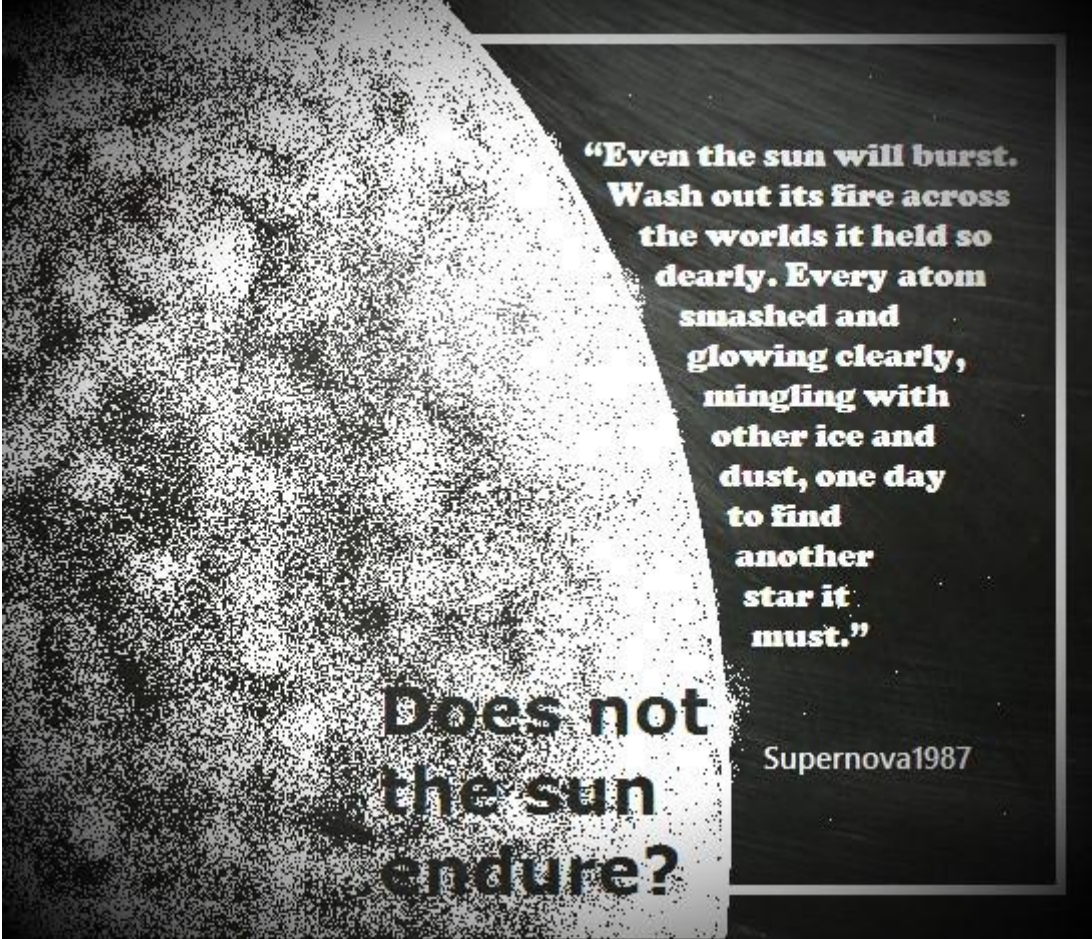
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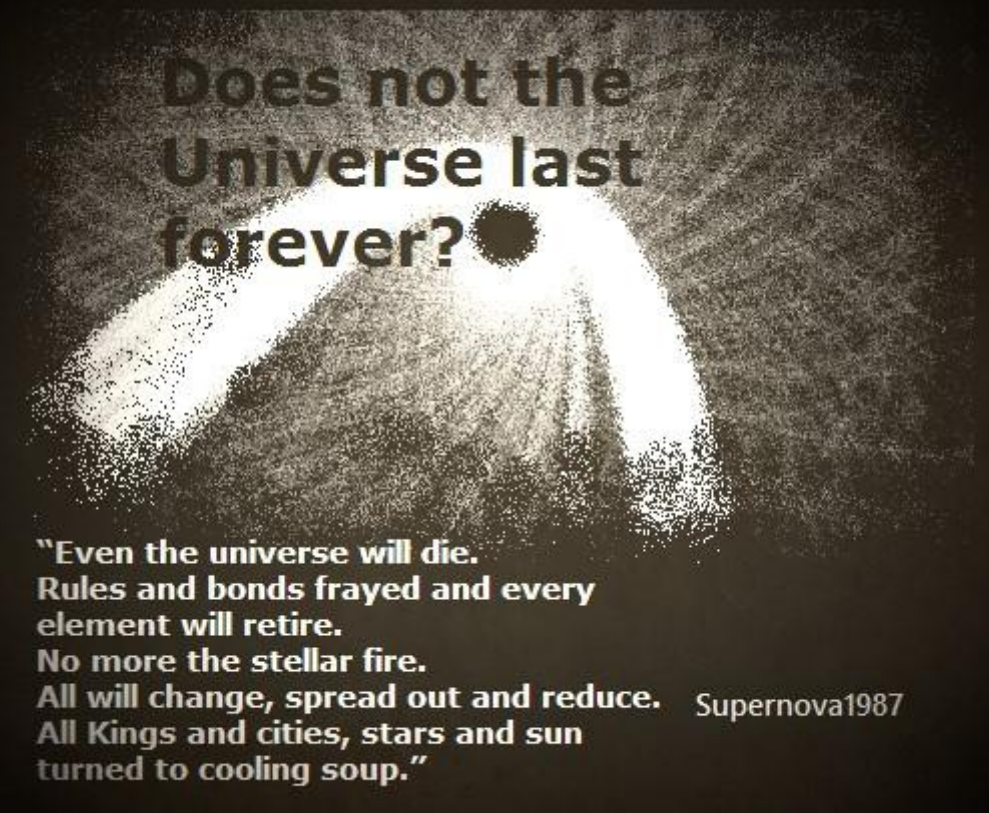
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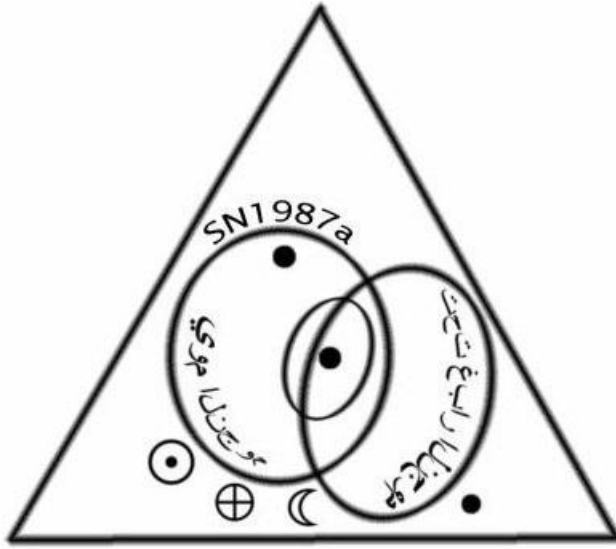
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Afterword.

*Anitya is a Sanskrit word meaning impermanence. Impermanence is a theme in many religions of the Far East. I chose to use it as the name of the small girl in this story to add to the general theme. In Buddhists' teachings, Mujo represents the notion that all things are in a constant state of change and that nothing will remain the same for ever. All of nature is represented by change. The Seasons cycle around the year, the Earth around the Sun, the Stars cycle around the Galaxy but none of these cycles are stable and can change again becoming something else. They cannot stay the same. The sun is becoming hotter, the earth's magnetic core will stop spinning, and even the elements and atoms we are made of will eventually fall apart.*

*I wanted to combine these themes to portray existence at the very edge of decay, when nothing of the universe remained except perhaps something preserved to stand as a relic of what had once been. Even in this situation, there is a sense that it cannot last forever and that ultimately it must change, becoming once more part of the process within the universe outside.*

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