

There were plenty there. With every meeting she mediated, yet more of them were stuffed into her closet, further increasing the instability created by their presence within that universe; with every meeting she held, her own instance of reality grew that much closer to... well, she *would* say collapse, but as far as the Mini-Starry was aware, it couldn't truly collapse anywhere given that it was already folded over so much that it barely existed to begin with.

In fact, she didn't even know what would happen once she hit a critical mass and the whole thing exploded, or whatever it would end up doing. All that power had to go *somewhere*, and she fully intended to take it all for herself, but what exactly that would do to the rest of the universe around her was... something of an unknown, to put it lightly. It *could* do nothing, allowing her to bypass the outer edges and become something greater; it *could* also just cause her entire universe to cease existing the moment she ascended, taking everyone else with it, *or* it could be that her becoming bigger than every other Starry would at long last expand her own cosmos to the point where it technically existed properly.

Nothing but dice-rolling there, and not the kind that Mini-Starry was at all comfortable with... but it was either that, or let things proceed as they were, and she simply couldn't allow that to happen. The vixen would rather take the uncertainty of her plan being put into action than the comforting mediocrity of a universe unmade and yet kept going through momentum alone; what sort of life was there when the dimensions making it up were infinitesimally small to the point of being barely extant? What was the *point* of it all if her reality was only allowed to be real because it made for a convenient meeting place?

No. She needed more meaning than that, even if she had to make it herself, even if she had to literally rip out chunks of soulstuff from every other Starry that came to visit her; it was necessary, or so she kept telling herself, to keep the rest of the collective from going a bit too loopy with their own power. It was necessary, to ensure that *she* had a spot at the table, and keep the other vixens from trampling all over her both physically *and* metaphysically.

But as the collection of soul shards grew larger, and the amount of power promised by them reached levels of infinity that strained the ability for mathematics to define, the time for *something* to happen came ever closer, at a rate too fast for Mini-Starry to really do anything about. If she didn't make the call to absorb the many shards into herself, then *reality* would, seeing as the moment all that power was unleashed, it was going to rush right into her and leave the vixen so tremendously, impossibly huge, that it would rip right through whatever counted as a universe in but an instant... and the multiverse right after it.

Sitting in her home one night, after a particularly troublesome meeting with half a dozen other Starries, the smallest vixen in existence looked at her closet, trying not to think too much about how its existence was bordering on the paradoxical. There lay an infinitely high amount of

energy in an infinitely small amount of space, creating the perfect conditions for a singularity that yet refused to form... for the time being. Her connection to the collective allowed Mini-Starry to understand just how close the whole thing was to an outward collapse, how close every *other* vixen was to knowing what was happening.

It was now or never. She needed to make a move and decide what to do, even if it meant destroying all those shards and forgetting about her plan entirely; at that point, even this would be acceptable, as the consequences for absorbing all of it would be *far* too much for her to bear... or, alternatively, just enough to be acceptable. Really, she didn't know, and it was not knowing that made it so stupidly difficult to make a decision.

Instinct was needed, untainted by the superego, governed entirely by id, instinct that cared not for rules but only for the truest fulfillment of one's innermost desires. Instinct, because if her contact with the collective had taught Mini-Starry anything, it was that the vixens' primal brains knew exactly what was best for them, even if their conscious minds often didn't. And what her instincts were telling her, oddly enough, was to take one of the soul shards and smash it on the ground; not absorb it, simply release its energies into the wild.

This would do nothing but send said energies careening back into her, as she was the only sink large and deep enough to hold that power without dissolving into primordial, multiversal metamatter... but when she obeyed her instincts, when she took one of the shards and sent it crashing onto the floor, she *didn't* immediately burgeon outwards with so much extra mass that it became a legitimate issue for herself and everyone that existed and ever could exist. Instead, she had silence.

It was very much a case of one being unable to appreciate what one had until one didn't have it anymore... or, in her case, there having been a constant, endlessly droning noise in the background at all times that her brain had learned to tune out, and now, absent said noise, something felt *weird*. Not wrong, but definitely off, enough so that Mini-Starry had to flinch and look for the source of the noise that wasn't there anymore, until she realised that it was, indeed, not there anymore.

Even odder was how referring to herself in those terms *felt* wrong, legitimately wrong, as if by calling herself a "Mini" anything, she was infringing upon some multiversal notion of absolute truth, like she *couldn't* be called or described as small without it being a falsehood. Which was strange, because she definitely *was* tiny... wasn't she? She *knew* she was much smaller than every other Starry in existence, and yet, whenever she thought about it in those terms, the notion felt *wrong*.

It took a while before the vixen came to understand why that was, along with a surprising amount of mental gymnastics that came along with coming to terms with just *what* she had done. For a while, she even tried to pretend like she hadn't; like the truth of the matter was not the truth, nevermind how she couldn't even sense the collective anymore. Whenever she tried, her mind touched... nothing. Nothing but a blank void, an expanse of nothingness that stretched for as far as she could "see", which, the more she tried looking, the more she realised wasn't that far at all.

Starry took a moment to fully understand the enormity of just what she'd done. She was still ascended, that much she could tell; her understanding of reality was still at a peak far beyond that of regular mortals, as were her memories of the collective and all the knowledge she'd gained with it. She was still *more* than she used to be... and yet, she couldn't sense of her supposed sisters, which was likely due to the fact that her universe, as far as she could tell, actually properly existed again.

She blinked. In that one moment, an epiphany struck at the door with all the subtlety of a train smashing into a cliff at maximum velocity: *she* hadn't been the one to absorb all the energy released by the soul shard. And with a literally infinite amount of it to be unleashed, there was no telling just *what* horrific blasphemy against physics she had committed... assuming it could even be quantified, and what she'd done hadn't upset the already-fragile balance left in the wake of the Starry collective turning the multiverse into their playground.

Worse yet, there were still the *other* shards to go around, and those weren't going to fix themselves. Quite the contrary, as the amount of buzzing coming from them was rapidly approaching levels that Starry could only assume were unsafe, considering the main emotion she was getting from them was *anger*; that, and a surprising amount of irritation, all things considered, almost as if the soulstuff within couldn't decide whether her actions were a heinous thing worthy of the utmost scorn, or just something bad enough to ruin their Sunday lunch plans.

That, or all the other vixens were pissy that their appointed mediator had suddenly decided to reach for more than she was allowed to grasp, and were now giving her the (almost) silent treatment. Could be any of those options, none, a selection, or several more that Starry didn't think about, because the mere thought that she'd unleashed a literally infinite amount of the collective's power into her universe was a bit too much for her to handle.

Practically panicking, the vixen walked up to her closet, slightly confused by how she had actual dimensions to traverse now, and needed to actually take steps in actual distance; it had been so long since this had been a normal part of her life that it took her a few minutes before she remembered how legs were meant to work, after which the main issue became the neural processes that were on backlog and needed to be taught how to function properly again. She

could only assume a similar scenario was ongoing literally *everywhere else* in her reality, and for once, she was *terrified* of the implications.

There was, however, a way to fix it: she could take the rest of the soul shards herself. A dreadful, horrifying prospect, one that would require her near-complete surrender to the same power that she sought to be freed from, one that would likely end in the termination of her home universe *right* as it had been given some room to breathe. She could try and rationalist it as the necessity for her to become a guardian deity, but she knew better; Starry was well aware that there was no guarantee her reality would survive an ascension stacked on top of an existing one, much less one powered by the soulstuff stolen from multiple other vixen goddesses.

But there were no other ways out. By stealing said power in the first place, Starry had locked herself out of any path of reasonable and sane resolution; the only way she was *ever* going to fix whatever blunder she had just made was by taking what remained of her stash, absorbing it, and then... do something with it. Whatever was waiting for her on the other side of the veil was too much for her to envision, enough so that making plans almost felt childish; what did *she* know about being a goddess, let alone one whose power source was the stolen essence of *other* deities?

Another step. She could feel the thrumming of the soul shards, like heartbeats resonating inside her; she could feel the anger, the resentment, the at-times *hatred* coming from them, as the pieces of divinity spirited from their “rightful” owners balked at what they saw as a corruption of the natural order. She could feel them wanting to lash out at her, yet being unable to do so, and the frustration derived from their helplessness. And above all, she could feel what lay within, *waiting* to be taken if only she had the willingness to do so.

Another step. Her vision tunnelled, blocking out everything that wasn't the contents of her closet, closing in on the prize, the ultimate prize, the one thing she would need to be complete. Starry saw herself as she could be, as the grandiose and magnificent All-Vixen, one who would command the very forces of meta-reality as easily as one would play with a ball of twine; the collective would bow to her, recognise her as their undisputed leader, and maybe, if she were feeling particularly generous, she *wouldn't* squish *their* universes into infinitesimal dots. Or the vixens themselves, for that matter!

Another step. She was smiling now, openly, as the images flashed by in her head in quick succession. All the possibilities opened to her if only she took the step needed to grasp at them, if only she were *brave* enough to do what had to be done. If only she relinquished her hold on her outdated notions of what made her *her* and embraced this new divinity offered to her on a silver platter. If only she lived up to the role of a *goddess*, as it was meant to be.

A smile. A grin, even, as Starry reached out for one of the soul shards. It quivered, knowing what was coming; shrinking away, it did the best it could as a disembodied chunk of soulstuff, which amounted to little beyond wobbling a bit on its shelf in its pitiful attempt at escaping. No match for simple motor skills; the vixen had her hands on it just a moment later, already feeling the power within attempting to seep into *her* soul, trying to fill *her*, that it may find a more suitable host. She could feel the distant wailing of a vixen goddess as they felt themselves being drained, and at that point, Starry knew what was going to happen.

Infinite power, but a finite amount of stolen shards. She hadn't had much time to gather them before they reached critical mass; there were at best about fifty of them, accounting for the one she threw on the ground, maybe less. They paled in comparison to the total number of Starries in the collective, and at no point would they even make a *dent* in their totality... at least, in terms of absolute amounts of Starries.

There might only be a relative handful less, but each one would give the former Mini-Starry a power boost of such a large scale that it would make it impossible for *any* of them to stand up to her... and she had about *fifty* of them, stored away in a convenient closet where she could gather them all and consume them at once. She could. She could just *do it* and no one would be able to stop her, not even the largest of the vixens.

So why shouldn't she? Was that not the unofficial motto of the collective? That if one was *capable* of seeking more, then one should? That limiting oneself to any one size, any one set of goals, was an affront to their very nature? Clearly, if that was the case, then her *not* absorbing all that power and making a hyper-goddess of himself was the "bad end" in that scenario; clearly, she should throw herself headfirst into the lunacy of ascension-based, exponential growth and forget about everything else. Clearly, she should take her rightful place as the ruler of the collective, and usher in a new age for all Starries everywhere.

She just had to take it.