

## Eschaton

Instead of light, there was darkness. No sound could be heard and there was no tangible evidence that any other ethereal souls were, similarly, in transit. Knowledge felt alone and, in some fashion, naked. He had a vague sense that it was dank and chilly. In addition, he found he couldn't breathe.

Not that he had to.

Instead of the prophesied '*Golden Gate*', Knowledge sensed he was crawling along inside a cold, dark sewer. There was no light at the end of this tunnel. There was no heavenly '*bright white light*' to behold; no triumphant blare of angel's trumpets - nor even the distant reverberation of melodious harps.

He could detect no sweet fragrance of holy myrrh, much less of burning gummy frankincense or Axe gel.

Worst of all, there was no tender or consoling caress from Mary to comfort him.

Instead, Knowledge experienced only a gnawing sense of foreboding. He began to entertain a fear of imminent celestial danger and reprisal.

*'What if there really is a God?'*

Having yielded life, was Knowledge now heading toward a disagreeable encounter with an unsympathetic - or, worse, - wrathful deity that he had emphatically forsaken?

Even if he had been among the chosen children of God, would he actually have enjoyed living - if the intellectually disabled and deceased can still call it that - in Eden? Would he not then simply be a supplicating, but contented, zombie?

Knowledge had no options. He kept crawling.

Adding to his anxieties, the seemingly strenuous effort was not only onerous, but the path seemed, - akin to that of *Sisyphus*?, -unending and forever uphill.

And most painful of all, the question that burned within his now illusory breast,

*"Where is my beloved Mary?"*

## The Arrival and The Epiphany

Knowledge arrived somewhere - as in an awakening. Still, he could see no light. He had no earthly senses of sight, sound, smell, or touch. Even so, he sensed the presence of another spirit.

Wordlessly, he queried, *"Who are you?"*

*"I am Jesus."*, came the ethereal reply.

This response both startled and elated Knowledge, but also gave him pause. What remained of his essence was immediately filled with wonderment - and innumerable questions. Could it be that he remained capable of coherent thought - or was this pneuma merely an illusion. *"Am I?"*

If any vestige of his heart had remained, he imagined it would have been pounding.

Somehow, somewhere, he appeared to be in contact with Jesus, the alleged Son of God.

*"I am not really God's son."*, Jesus preempted. *"In their fervor, the early religious novelists were infelicitous, confounding gospel with orchestrated, but socially and politically beneficial, fantasy. Not that it mattered. At the time, precious few could read. But that series of self-serving opportunists - Paul was, clearly, the worst - kept creating, embellishing and pimping a mythology that has since lasted for millennia.*

*Worse, to continue enjoying the ambiance and freedoms of Rome, some of these sycophantic charlatans even attempted to absolve those criminal bastards, - the Romans, - of my crucifixion.*

*"Then, again, another pundit had me walking on water.*

*Never happened. Anyway, what would that prove? ... that I couldn't swim?*

*"On top of it all, to curry favor with the devout Jews awaiting the arrival of a messiah, anointed by God and physically descended from the Davidic line, one who would rule the united tribes of Israel and herald the Messianic Age of global peace also known as the 'World to Come', another fraud concocted an incredibly implausible fabrication that moved my birthplace from Nazareth to Jerusalem.*

*He had me swaddled in an alien manger and visited by a gaggle of kings bearing gifts.*

*In actuality, if I was really placed in a manger at birth, it would have been within our very own family hovel in our backwater homestead in Nazareth.*

*"And, as far as I know, my only birth gift was goat's milk.*

*"From all the hype, you would have also been taught to believe that I had shown exceptional moral insight plus a keenly-honed intellectual ability. In truth, I was just a simple, inordinately pious and devout Jew.*

*Still, I like to think I was a compassionate person - at least, by the wretched standards of that savage and brutal time.*

*“Sad to say, I was never schooled; couldn’t read or write; spoke with a rustic twang; and had scavenged my preaching memes from John, the Baptizer. And like most common folk, aside from that baptism, I never bathed.*

*“On top to all that, while I earnestly tried, I couldn’t heal worth shit. “But then I didn’t charge anything for my shamanism either.*

*“However, I quickly learned that really sick people will come to you to try anything to regain some vestige of health - especially if the incantations are really, really mystical, impenetrable, - and free.*

*“One thing that was written about me is sorta true.*

*“I did rise from the dead - or, at least, appeared to.*

*“What I think actually happened is ...- I had lost consciousness during my ordeal and hadn’t fully expired during my crucifixion - when my ever-attendant camp followers promptly cut me down.*

*They fussed and wailed over me until I surprisingly revived and could stand and move about. However, after a few days, infection set in and I went down for the count.*

*“The whole grisly episode made grist for a really grand exit story in which I was pronounced to have been catapulted into heaven.”*

*“Are we in heaven, now”, Knowledge queried Jesus, hoping he would turn the lights on.*

*“Didn’t you understand what I just told you?”, Jesus’ quiddity replied. “We are both in hell.”*

There followed a long hiatus during which Knowledge struggled to make sense of his surroundings.

*“I thought I should end up here if such a place existed, Knowledge acknowledged, but why are you here?”*

*“My whole family; all my relatives: parents, brothers, sisters, - all - have been consigned to this darkness.”*

*“... but God, your Father? ...”*

*“My mother recalls being disturbed by a very old, white-bearded man one night when she was yet a girl, but he seemed to be without seed. Besides which, everyone says I have Joseph’s nose ...”*

Knowledge had gleaned enough for the time being - and it was dark.

## Society of the Damned

Knowledge mused. In retrospect, it was not a surprise that he had been consigned to hell. Throughout life, he had fervently, and it turns out, incorrectly, challenged its actual existence.

But, what, exactly, was hell? Where was the *‘fire and brimstone’*?

Knowledge still couldn't sense anything but the presence of other vague presences. He imagined he heard thoughts. He speculated on who might be sharing hell with him.

He imagined Mark Twain.

*“Nice to meet you!”*, declared Mr. Clemens. *“I think you’re gonna like it here. “All the most intriguing people who ever lived have taken up residence in hell - and, needless to say, they have plenty of time to visit and chat. All you gotta do is think of them and ...”*

*“I can visit with anyone here - just as if they are on the on my cell phone?”*, Knowledge posited.

*“Just so! - only there is no FaceTime here since no one has any tangible senses remaining.”*, Sam advised.

*“Personally, I have found hell to be a pleasant place in most respects.”* he added. *“Even my dog is here.”*

It is hard to believe my good fortune, Knowledge concluded. Hell was ... - well, - not hell.

Over an indeterminate period of time, Knowledge went on to contact many of his favorite people: family, friends, inspirational heroes, great scientists and writers, sports and screen idols... All those he conjured were here. They were interesting, outspoken and uninhibited. Most of their worldly posturing and pretense had been left behind.

After all, why hold anything back.

We were already in hell.

## A Chat with the Devil

Nevertheless, Knowledge mourned. The most important person in his life, Mary, was the only one he had repeatedly been unable to contact midst his hellish reveries.

Where was Mary? Had she ascended to Heaven? Or was she still among those living on that monstrous scene of carnage and devastation that now encompassed earth's residuals?

Knowledge decided to try a radical approach. He would conjure hell's evil nemesis, Luci.

*"Good to have you here."*, the voluble Luci chirped. *"You are a particularly fortuitous addition to my realm."*

*"Would you answer some questions for me?"*, Knowledge pleaded, anticipating Luci's wrath and recriminations.

*"Sure! I will enjoy disabusing you of your idealistic and romantic fantasies."*

*"First of all, Where is Mary?"*, Knowledge well-nigh begged.

*"I don't know. What next!"*

*"I don't believe you!"*, Knowledge impulsively challenged, surprising even himself.

*"She's not here - and I haven't looked for her elsewhere. It is that simple. If she were here, you would have successfully contacted her yourself since hell-dwellers enjoy full 'spirit access neutrality' at no extra charge."*

*"I might add,"* Luci continued proudly, *"that I am inordinately busy now that the essences of most of humanity have descended into my domain. By latest count, hell has absorbed virtually all of the seven billion, - you might call them, 'souls', - as part of our disproportionate harvest of earth's sentient life."*

*"Currently, I am sorting all these 'soular residuals' into three groups."*

*While I am very fond of Dante's concept of the numerous levels of hell, I have decided that nine is too many to administer with varying degrees of savagery and cruelty, so I have settled on just three."*

*My basement (toilet) level contains all those I never want to see, think about, or hear of again.*

*As Dante admonished, 'Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate', (Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.)*

*Middle Hell is populated with the great multitude of ordinary sinners, most of whom never recognized or acknowledged that they were sinners at all - even after being confronted with their miserable voting records.*

*Personally, I prefer to spend most of my leisure time in Hell's Limbo which is a relatively quiet and, I believe, tenable place, with the least moaning and complaining about the climate.*

*I provide no escape from Limbo Hell, but many ensconced in this region might argue that residence there is far preferable to spending a boring eternity browsing - aimlessly and brainlessly - in a mindless Eden."*

Luci went on, sparing no detail on her protocols for assignment of inmates to Hell's evil compartments.

Knowledge was dispirited, his query unanswered,

*'What had happened to his beloved?'*

At least, she was not in Hell.

## Adam and Eve Repatriated

God was pleased.

Adam, Eve, - even Luci - had each faithfully executed His plan to corral and recapture all the knowledge of good and evil that had gone astray on earth following His *Cacciata dei progenitori dall'Eden* (expulsion of the apple-eaters from Eden).

Most of the world's sentient souls, as weightless as Higg's bosons and elusive as dark matter, were now safely confined in Hell, while barely seventy-odd articulated omnibuses filled with truly passionate God-fearing sycophants had been granted entree to the Elysian Fields.

Heaven's happy hapless would barely fill a major university's football stadium.

And even though they remained clearly unworthy sinners, the agents of His assault on knowledge, Adam and Eve, would be delivered of their promised rewards and be returned to His Garden.

God's decision was a concession to practicality.

He had to have someone do His dirty work.

On re-arrival, Eve took one look at the Garden and shuddered. Somehow, someone, had failed or not been instructed to expunge her intellect - so that Eve now saw Eden with the eyes of one who still possessed sensibility, sensitivity, discernment, feeling, knowledge - and smell.

Eve glanced at Adam - and, from his grimace, it appeared that he, too, had retained his faculties. Both had taken great pains to avoid allowing themselves to become infected during the global pandemic with Luci's *ignorance virus*. They had taken exceptional care since they were loath to part with their own knowledge and intelligence - not to mention, risk sacrificing the thrill of their intimacy.

Now, almost to their astonishment, God, himself, had received them back to Eden, each still armed with the capability for rational thought and independent action.

They each realized, God had made a boo-boo.

## A Return Visit to the Tree

Adam and Eve followed the verdant path. Just as they remembered, there it was, - the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Again, Lilith was comfortably and beguilingly entwined in its branches.

*“Welcome back to the Garden”, she cooed. “How did you enjoy your term of banishment in God’s earthly underworld?”*

*“How is it that God puts up with you - allowing you to continue to dwell in his special tree and proselytize among his chosen to promote rebellion and mutiny?”*, Adam demanded in response.

*“It seems you have retained a degree of sinful cynicism,”* Lilith observed immediately. *“Can it be that you still possess knowledge?”*

Adam was having none of this banter. He deeply mistrusted Lilith, although he begrudgingly credited her with divulging the divine benefits of knowledge.

However, Lilith was evil, subversive, traitorous, ... She, or it, held allegiance neither to Paradise nor to God. Lilith was devoted to creating dissent and bringing pain and misfortune to all she encountered.

Adam drew Eve away to a distant, secluded and, he hoped, private spot.

*“I hate this place.”*, he confided. *“We have to get away from here as soon as ...”*

Eve was well ahead of him. She had been planning escape Eden from the moment she laid eyes on Lilith and the God-forsaken apple tree.

## Eden Revisited

Paradise smelled bad.

Reeking from the residual deposits of innumerable animals, both large and larger, as well from the emanations and defecations of Eden's clearly unconcerned inhabitants, stross could be found everywhere. No expanse of garden foliage could subsume the ever-increasing accumulation of fecal waste, trash, and garbage.

Paradise's dinosaurs were, without question, the greatest offenders.

And although none of the Edeners seemed to take notice, there was nary a port-a-potty in Heaven.

How to leave this foul place? Where to go? Would life on what was left of earth be any more bearable than the revulsion any thinking, sentient being would endure in God's putrescent zombie land?

Adam and Eve recognized that it was their own fault. They had labored diligently and enthusiastically, even aligning with evil forces, to recapture knowledge from the earth.

In the process, they had brought quietus to billions of humans most of whose residual essences had now been transported to hell.

Just as bad, they had delivered the world's most pitiable, senseless, and gullible human souls to an intellectual wasteland where their only consolation, if they could have even perceived it, would be that they were no longer capable of recognizing their own state of slavery and loss of reason.

If anyone, Adam and Eve should be among those rotting in hell along with the multitudes they had betrayed.

Oddly, and penitently, they agreed.

It was also, it turns out, Rosh Hashanah which, in Jewish tradition, is believed to be the anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve - and a time for introspection and casting off of sins.

They would petition God to be cast into hell.

## Escape from Eden: A Reprise

It was not hard to persuade God to send them both to hell.

God realized that he had violated His very own sacred principles in sanctioning any evildoers, even those He had Himself conscripted, such as Adam and Eve, to return to Eden - effectively as a reward for the resounding success of their iniquities.

Annoyed with Himself, and as part of their shipment to hell, God decided to further cleanse Eden following more extreme vetting.

A critical review of each of Eden's inmates revealed that, in the turbulence of the global influx, He had harbored some interlopers who were, in retrospect, unworthy of occupying His Heavenly sanctuary.

In conducting His review, God came upon one particular agonized soul that pleaded to know the fate of her beloved, - Knowledge.

God winced. He had to reveal to Mary that Knowledge had been relegated to hell - for the sin of...? - simply being the kernel of knowledge on earth - and an unbeliever.

God, especially, realized that this was hardly an honorable excuse for such a cruel and unfair judgment on His part.

Knowledge had shown himself to be a decent, hard-working, compassionate person. He had led an exemplary life.

What Mary asked next shocked Him. Would He send her to hell to unite with her love? It meant that much to her simply to be with him - especially in his suffering.

God was almost moved to tears.

Embarrassed, God sent all His culls, as well as the petitioner, Mary, to hell.

He felt He could not bear to face her in Eden forever.

## Reunited in Hell

Mary conjured Knowledge instantly upon arrival.

They were now both together in Hell

- and they were happy.

The sweethearts exchanged reminiscences of their earthly life. They detailed their celestial journeys for hours, days, ... Ethereal flowers seemed to bloom in the halo of the radiance from their innocent and unblemished ardor.

Theirs was undiluted love - at its purest and most righteous.

Their mutual joy transcended any discomfort their perilous surroundings might inflict on souls less intimately entwined.

Gradually, other hell-confined spirits began to take notice. They listened to the discourse of the lovers. They were moved. Tears of compassion began to mix with Hell's standard fare of tears of pain.

The aura of the requited love of the sweethearts seemed to serve as balm for some of Hell's collective pain and distress.

It wasn't long before over 10<sup>10</sup> hits were logged on Knowledge's transcendental home page.

*'Perhaps', one wag tweeted, 'love IS all you really need ...'*

Hell was abuzz. The unaccustomed essence of Love began to permeate its foul air.

As many hearkened to the simple colloquy between the lovers, virtual tears came to all who retained any sense of empathy and compassion.

And, then, - an intensifying groundswell of outrage.

How could God have let this happen? He had unfairly consigned two of the most loving and virtuous people in the universe to hell.

This was inexcusable. Even God should not be permitted to escape unchastened for such an unethical and flagrant violation of justice.

Moreover, if God had so conspicuously erred in this judgment, what about His other referrals?

An appeal to a higher court was in order.

By now, the clients of hell were in a feverish uproar.

Seizing common cause with the unfairly punished lovers, the residual billions of self-righteous condemned sinners quickly became agitated and unified with a growing passion for rebellion from that despotic God who had placed all of them, without just cause they felt certain, in this extraterrestrial penal colony.

They would demand their day in ...

They would appeal to ...

Who?

## Rebellion

Even by Hell's standards, the tumult created by the infuriated, rebellious inmates was becoming irritating and exasperating to its keepers.

Uncharacteristically, Luci found herself at a loss. She was no longer able to control routine events or effectively impose heinous punishments.

Even as the coordinated pandemonium continued to intensify, Hell's she-devil actually began to lobby her wards to maintain some degree of tranquility. Worse, threatening to inflict pain and retribution was no longer serving as an effective ultimatum for cowing her internees.

Anger trumped agony.

Hell's patrons smelled blood - and, for once, it was not their own. Their amalgamated fury intensified and, like the universe itself, inexorably continued to expand.

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In anger and desperation, Luci decided to consult God. After all, His actions had precipitated this revolution. He should be called upon to acknowledge, confront, and mitigate it.

God had heard and was already being inconvenienced by Hell's cacophony. No sooner had He begun to fully enjoy the fawning and prayerful praise from Heaven's remaining sycophants - now that the last of its troublemakers had been purged, - but the howls of Hell's enraged hordes was viscerally penetrating to the very core of His Paradise.

Eden's inhabitants were, first, startled, then, progressively, confused and upset by the rising din and caterwauling. God's adoring fan base was becoming restless. Some even had the temerity to question whether something was amiss - or out of His control - in the Elysian Fields.

Meeting at a neutral site in Purgatory, God and Luci, at first, agreed to simply let the furor die down. With time, they reasoned, Hell's revolutionary passion - and this unprecedented solidarity of the damned - would dissipate.

But, somehow, Hell's mutineers either sensed, or learned through Wikileaks, of this profane collaboration. Moreover, their captor and tormentor's strategy seemed self-evident.

Accordingly, the condemned rabble labored to increase their ululation, synchronizing their combined resonations until God's very firmament trembled.

The intensified vibrations of billions of Hell's full-throated banshees even threatened to *'break the waters'*.

A heavenly tsunami was in the offing.

*"Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."*

Meanwhile, Eden's agitated tenants were approaching unaccompanied panic and beginning to lose confidence - even, faith - in God's ability to maintain serenity and provide them with eternally serene protection.

As a result, Eden's seemingly passive predators were beginning to look alarmingly predaceous.

God and Luci regarded each other with dismay. Before long, an irascible and impatient Luci demanded urgent, concrete action to quell the instability in both their realms.

Under these circumstances, and on second thought, God felt inclined to make an accommodation.

After all, as everyone knew, He was a merciful and forgiving God.

If Luci would concur, He would moderate His condemnations of all the souls in Hell, precluding any further imposition of intense pain and suffering on them.

Of course, Luci would continue to reign over Hell's domain, but she would inflict no further suffering, abusive indignities or retributive punishments on Hell's residents.

It would be somewhat akin to a celestial amnesty.

Reluctantly, Luci agreed, but not without exacting some territorial claims on God's own domain.

She would be granted perpetual dominion over that portion of the Garden that included His apple orchard.

Considering all the trouble this plot had already caused Him, God conceded this parcel.

"The Path to Paradise begins in Hell" Dante

Following amnesty and absolution, Hell began to take on a different aspect.

Darkness receded. A range of color (besides, red) returned. Pervasive communal fear was gradually replaced by an inexplicable blend of relief and modest contentment.

In many metaphysical respects, Hell began to resemble Eden, except for the absence of dinosaurs, fearsome wild beasts and perpetually-praying, passive petitioners.

The once-terrible appearance of Hell began to mellow into more pastoral and bucolic imagery.

But there were important differences, too. There were a great number of souls in Hell. Despite their vanishingly low density, the netherworld could be considered quite crowded. Accordingly, Hell's newly enfranchised populace began to reorganize themselves in an effort to ease accommodations.

A degree of organization was possible in Hell because many of the hellions, as they referred to themselves, remained sentient. Their intellectual residuals had not been fully cleansed in preparation for an eternity in Eden. Instead, they were to be allowed -or condemned - to sense the pain and humiliation of eternal damnation.

As a result, Hell's engineers, scientists, and bureaucrats were still capable of planning.

Some of their number began to develop protocols for prodding Hell's internees toward a more equitable and tranquil sharing of the resources of their overpopulated netherworld.

There could even be waste collection and sanitary disposal - in the event any tangible solid waste was generated.

Death in mortal sin had become, - not only, less forbidding - but, somewhat more convivial.

“Happy as Hell”

Accordingly, the din subsided to a gentle thrumming.

Still, among the murmur of those that had been granted God’s dispensation from pain and torture could be heard some rather insolent, voices:

*“Let this hell be our heaven.”*

*Richard Matheson, What Dreams May Come*

*“I would prefer an intelligent hell to a stupid paradise.”*

*Blaise Pascal and Victor Hugo*

*“... whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.”*

*Isaac Asimov*

*“A fool's paradise is a wise man's hell.”*

*Thomas Fuller*

*“You won't burn in hell. But be nice anyway.”*

*Ricky Gervais*

*“I don't like to commit myself about Heaven and Hell, - you see, I have friends in both places.”*

*Mark Twain*

*“Hell is just a frame of mind.”*

*Christopher Marlowe*

*“So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl?" Old wives' tales!”*

*Jean-Paul Sartre*

*“The mind is a universe and can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”*

*John Milton*

*“Once I was free in the shackles of sin:  
Free to be tempted, just bound to give in;  
Free to be captive to any desire;  
Free to eternally burn in hell’s fire.  
‘Til Someone bought me and called me His slave:  
Bound by commands I am free to obey;  
Captive by beauty I’m free to adore—  
Sentenced to sit at His feet evermore.”*  
John MacArthur

*“No, there are no special places in hell. Hell is a democracy.”*  
Mike Carey

*“Hell is paved with good intentions.”*  
Samuel Johnson

*“Heaven and Hell make no sense if the majority of humans are a complex mixture of good and evil. There’s no reason to receive a reward if you’re 57/43. Why sit around forever in an elevated version of Club Med?”*  
Norman Mailer

*“Hell is full of musical amateurs: music is the brandy of the damned. May not one lost soul be permitted to abstain?”*  
George Bernard Shaw

*“To rule by fettering the mind through fear of punishment in another world, is just as base as to use force. Reserve your right to think, - for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all.”*  
Hypatia

*“Written over the gate here are the words 'Leave every hope behind, ye who enter.' Only think what a relief that is! For what is hope? A form of moral responsibility. Here there is no hope, and consequently no duty, no work, nothing to be gained by praying, nothing to be lost by doing what you like. Hell, in short is a place where you have nothing to do but amuse yourself.”*  
George Bernard Shaw

*“Hell will be Heaven with Friends, Heaven will be Hell without them.”*  
Aman Jassal

*“In monasteries, seminaries, retreats and synagogues, they fear hell and seek paradise. Those who know the mysteries of God never let that seed be planted in their souls.”*

*Omar Khayyam*

*“The possibility of paradise hovers on the cusp of coming into being, so much so that it takes powerful forces to keep such a paradise at bay.*

*If paradise now arises in hell, it's because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way.”*

*Rebecca Solnit*

*“Eternal peace is hell for the adventurers.”*

*Toba Beta*

*“Hierarchies are celestial. In hell all are equal.”*

*Nicolás Gómez Dávila*

*“Heaven without love? ... what a hell. (Paradis sans amour : voilà ce qu'est l'enfer)”*

*Charles de Leusse*

*“Take her head upon your knee; Say to her, "My dear, my dear, It is not so dreadful here.”*

*Edna St. Vincent Millay*

Despite a network of electronic firewalls and spam filters to preclude intergalactic communications, there appeared to be some unsanctioned crosstalk between Heaven and Hell.

Through this breach, an assortment of the smug, self-satisfied adorers of God in Heaven had discovered that the damned souls in Hell were no longer being subjected to pain and misery.

Moreover, some of Hell's condemned sinners were reputed to be happy.

This being the case, why had Eden's saintly made the sacrifice of remaining virtuous throughout their lives?

The promised pitiless and unending penalties of Hell were a major motivation for these chosen to remain faithful to an invisible and unresponsive God - and, for a handful of these devotees, to remain celibate as well.

To further curry favor with God and ensure their entry to Paradise, many true believers had steadfastly repudiated logic and resisted subscribing to advances in technology and science, particularly whenever these concepts conflicted with - or worse, refuted - their biblical mythologies.

A surprising proportion of devout Paridisiens had, similarly, uncritically renounced all the inconvenient scientific truths aggregated by Al Gore, even going so far as to lend credence - even repute - to Senator James Imhofe's (Republican, Oklahoma) exposé of the "*the second-largest hoax ever played on the American people, after the separation of church and state.*"

Jimmy's target was the frighteningly un-Biblical concept of anthropogenically induced global warming.

Intellectual - and scientific - advisor to the faithful and credulous, '*Mountain Jim*' ignored the existence and use of the thermometer as well as data from orbiting satellites as he revealed - and explained - that:

*"no meaningful warming has occurred in the last century."*

*"as long as the earth remains there will be seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night."*      *Genesis 8:22*

If choosing to willingly subscribe to such Imhofian improbabilities - and other impossibilities - did not bring them heavenly reward and, further, distinctly separate them from their unrepentant and unworthy companions on earth who, they were promised, would endure eternal torture in Hell, what was their abject denial good for?

Had their life-long physical - as well as intellectual sacrifices - not really been worthwhile?

Might they just as well have accepted the benefits that science had offered, fully utilized their intellect - and, ultimately, - entered Club Hell themselves?

Celestial Amnesty was leading to dissension in Heaven.

## The Exodus or "See You in Hell"

It was a one-way trip.

Heaven's elect could be consigned - or, in some cases, allowed - to dwell among the derelict Hellions, whereas any elevation to God's sacred province was strictly prohibited.

Even so, beginning in a halting and totally unforeseen fashion, an exodus from Heaven began.

For most of the migrants, their migration was motivated by an intense, innate desire to be reunited with their families and loved ones.

Many, just as Mary, had found that Paradise could be a terribly lonely place without the solace and peace-of-mind that comes only from being close to those with whom one has shared life, love, and, - yes, - even pain.

And now that Hell was, reputedly, virtually free of pain and punishment, what did they have to lose?

God was mortified. How could this be happening?

Didn't the once-in-a-deathtime opportunity for His chosen heavenly host to spend an eternity next to Him, so that He could listen to and revel in their praise, trump any residual earthly social and familial encumbrances?

Apparently not.

The trickle grew into a rivulet; then, an outpour. The Garden's select population, never very large owing to God's stringent criteria for access, was diminishing to the point of impending labor shortages.

Even some of His angels had to put aside their lutes in order to work at cultivating and weeding.

God imagined His glory fading.

## Luci confronts Hell's Immigration Problem

One would have thought that Luci would be enthralled.

After all, the way things were evolving in Heaven, Hell would soon encompass essentially all the spirits in the universe.

But what to do with this unproductive collection of vapors?

The reasons for the escalating defections from Zion embodied Luci's problem.

Partly, she had capacity and management issues;

But, mostly, she was aggravated by Hell's rapidly emerging, unbridled spirit of jubilation - newly created by repatriation and reunion.

Hell was not only becoming a desirable destination where kindred souls reconnected; it was becoming both a sought-after haven and a celestial refuge from intellectual captivity and eternal boredom.

Having reluctantly given up her franchise to impose and supervise pain and suffering, this turn of events did not mesh with Luci's concept of either improvement or empowerment.

This was not Luci's idea of Hell.

Make no mistake.

Luci was not above abrogating her agreement - unilaterally.

## Hell Freezes Over

Luci could still control Hell's climate - or, in this case, its perceived temperature.

So, in raw, defiant, uncontrollable anger, she decided to completely turn off Hell's heat.

It seemingly took only moments for intergalactic space weather conditions to become established. Atomic and molecular vibrations and related oscillations diminished to a virtual standstill.

Ethereal communications slowed; then, ceased.

No complaints were heard because no pulsations or reverberations could be perceived at any frequency.

It was as if death, in its ultimate darkness, had finally come to the whole of the universe's vast population. All Hell had become a void of soundless and illimitable dark matter.

0° Kelvin (and Rankine) had finally been achieved.

*Primum frigidum.* It was irreversible.

All was quiet now.

Luci quickly became bored.

Impulsively, she had ceded rule of her once powerful and violent domain to a great nothingness. Her very *raison d'être* could no longer be rationalized.

Even new recruits, if there were still any to be had, would have no substantive Hell to dwell in.

Death had become, - simply, - death.

Luci would normally have foreseen this. However, in her fury, she had acted impulsively in imposing the nuclear cold sanction - and it had resulted in her voiding the Universe of its most renowned - and feared - destination for the damned.

Still, Luci would not - or, perhaps, at this terminal point, could not - back down.

Even if it might be possible for her to muster the universe's electrochemical resources and aggregate the enormous energy cache required to restore her province, her pride precluded her giving Hell's rebels the satisfaction of seeing her flail against her self-inflicted misadventure.

Growing ever more upset, irritated, and restless, Luci would visit God and see how things were devolving in His depleted Heaven.

God dropped his hoe and welcomed the distraction. Since His amnesty, followed by the exodus, He had lost much of His heavenly labor force. He now spent much of His time doing routine chores in His Garden.

There was little for Him to do with no one to watch over on an earthly underworld now bereft of human life.

Just as Luci, He felt the unfamiliar weight of boredom now that there was so little call for use of His Godly powers in the cosmos.

Luci and God spoke of old times. Unabashedly, they revealed, recounted, and lamented the mistakes they had both made. Sometimes, they quipped, they had acted almost as if they were human.

The old adversaries chuckled at the many ruses they had devised to undermine one another's influence in the yin and yang of their struggle for humanity's souls

They recounted their many rivalries for recruitment of essences for their competing afterworlds.

Perhaps, they could now be cosmic friends - spiritual equals - in a universe that no longer required - or accommodated - conflict between good and evil.

## Postpartum

Luci and God fashioned an arrangement.

Since Luci had no residual *'home'* to which to return or celestial prison to dominate, She would need an alternative dwelling place.

She reminded God of His pledge to cede His orchard to Her.

Luci would set up Her celestial residence in the Garden, alongside God.

They would regale each other with tales of former glories - and atrocities.

They would provide diversions and keep each other company.

Luci could be an entertaining and, without hell to administer, a whimsical Devil.

At this juncture, the erstwhile adversaries could erase their enmity, cease their incessant pursuit of dominance, relax their tensions, and enjoy an eternity of peace and quiet together.

Why not?

Theirs was a marriage made in Heaven.