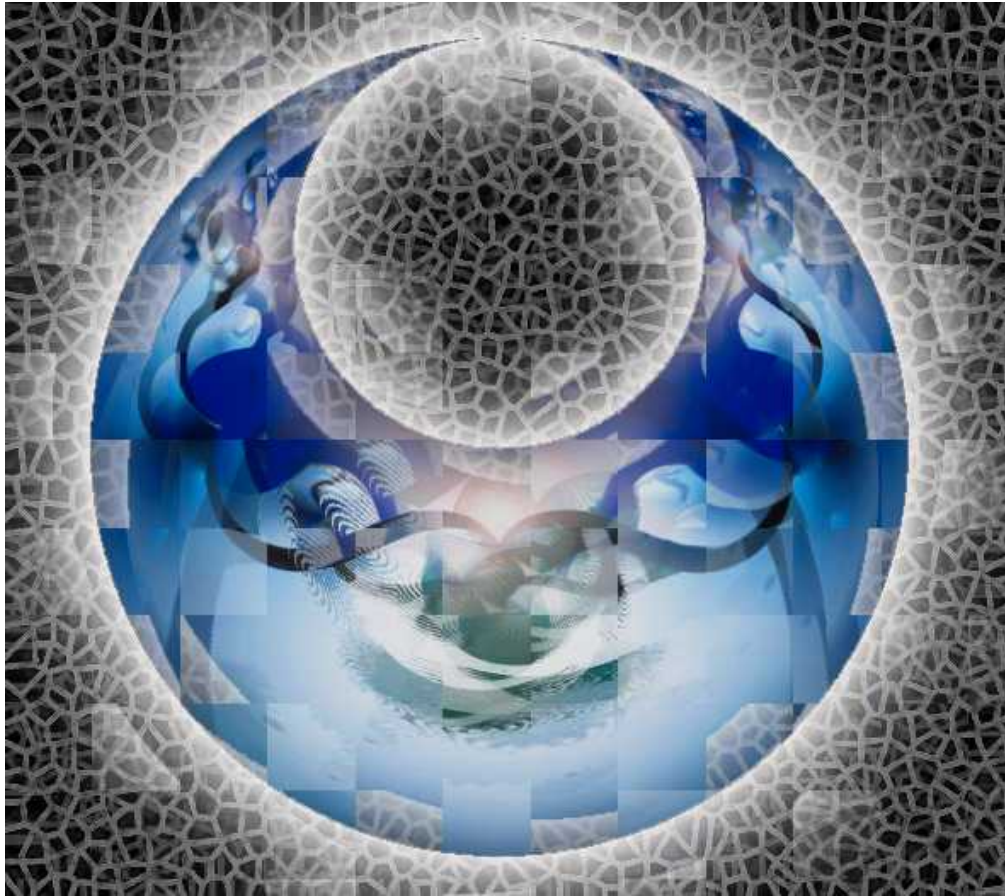


NUCLEAR WINTER:

At The Edge Between Meaning and Nihilism



An image of a crescent moon with dark, cracked barrier hung in a coffee shop near Mt. Fuji. It felt like a quiet warning no one quite acknowledged. For a long moment, no one spoke, letting the previous poems settle into their bones.

Frida leaned forward then, her fingers loosely clasped as if trying to hold onto something fragile. "Even though these poems dwell on death and destruction," she said, her voice steady but searching, "there's still hope in many of them." "It's not obvious. You have to look beneath the surface. But it's there, buried beneath all the darkness."

Across the table, Satoru tilted his head slightly. A faint furrow appeared between his brows as he considered her words. He rested a finger on his coffee cup almost absentmindedly. "Hope?" Satoru echoed, the word sounding more like a question than a challenge. "I'm not sure it portrays anything at all." He leaned back in his chair, gaze drifting past the others. "To me, it's just abstraction: shapes without obligation. It doesn't mean—it simply is."

Ying gave a small nod, her expression sharpening with quiet agreement. "Exactly," she said, brushing an invisible speck of dust from the table. "People are too eager to pin meaning onto everything. Sometimes there's nothing here to find. Just mathematical patterns and noise." Her tone was calm, but there was a hint of dismissal in it, like closing a book before the final page.

Dmjitri shifted in his seat, the legs of his chair scraping faintly against the floor. He folded his arms, then unfolded them again, as if the thought itself made him restless. "Or maybe the opposite is true," he said. "Maybe the real danger is when we vacuum all meaning away and we are faced with emptiness." His gaze moved between them, sharper now. "If everything becomes meaningless, doesn't that lead us straight into nihilism?"

Frida looked down at the poem again, her earlier certainty softened but not gone. When she spoke, it was quieter, almost to herself. "Maybe," she said. "But if there's no meaning at all..." She paused, searching for the right shape of the thought. "Then what's left to hope for?"

No one answered immediately. The silence that followed felt longer than it was, stretching thin and cold—like a landscape after something irreversible had already happened. Outside, the fading daylight surrendered to evening, while inside the room each person remained alone with the same unsettling question.

For an instant, it felt as though they were standing together in the aftermath of an invisible winter, where certainty had frozen, and hope itself had become something that needed defending.

Note: This piece was partially generated with AI tools for styling and ideation; human editing was then applied.

- T Newfields

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