The Gesture of Destroying

When [disturbance and destruction] are without intention, however, when they occur with “pure motives,” then they are evil, which happens rarely because it is inhuman (as is “pure good,” regrettably.) And then they are terrifying.

— Flusser, Gestures, 60

Some called her Abaddon. She had silver-grey wings with razor edges and yawned a lot and she was very old, though it didn’t show. Some called her Amanita. She had been sent down a long time ago to what is now New Jersey to collect the soil that would be used to create Adam. It was kind of fun — exercised her creative impulses, etc. — and so she stayed, and found more soil, and kept going. Except this time she kept the soil for herself, and tried her hand at some of her own heavenly sculpting. She decided that Adam would be less lonely if he had a dog to keep him company, and so she grabbed some dirt and went to work. The first one didn’t come out so well, and so she tried again. That one didn’t look right, either, and so she took more soil and made a third. After several days of this — and several thousand attempts — Abaddon yawned and realized this wasn’t her particular calling. She kept her half-puppies around her for
sentiment’s sake: later people would refer to them as “locusts” and paint images of the woman surrounded by a sea of tiny dogs with human faces and tiger teeth and what looked like scorpion stingers on their tails. (When she saw some of these images she thought, Come on, they don’t look THAT bad…) One afternoon she woke up from a nap and looked over at the dogs and for no reason at all she incinerated all of them.

And so the destroying angel left off from her experiment in sculpting, and she beat her shiny silver-grey wings and moved on to other things. Perhaps I will be a writer, she thought. She bought a laptop and began a novel about her thousands of little mutant puppies, and she invented thousands of worlds for them to inhabit and thousands of lives for them to live, and when she got to the end she printed it all out — it took three days to do so — and built a wall with the pages and perched the computer on top. When it was done she stood back and faced the wall, and yawned, and beat her razored wings until the entire thing was shredded.

Perhaps I will be an orator, she thought. She signed up for voice lessons at the community center, and read the works of Quintillian, and watched old presidential debates on YouTube, and studied the speeches of the speakers she admired. And one morning, after falling asleep while reading Cicero, she woke up and spun her head around and whipped her knife-wings across her own face until nothing of her mouth remained but a bloody hole.

Perhaps I will be a maker of things, she thought. She took online courses in woodcraft and the electronic arts, and sent away for parts, and when the parts arrived she tried anew to make those little dogs for Adam — he might not be around to appreciate them anymore, but his descendants sure were — and she built roomsful of tiny breathing robots with dogs’ bodies and men’s faces and sent them off to make their tiny breathing robot fortunes in the world. (She kept one or two at home for company.) And one day she summoned them all back, having grown lonely, and made tiny little beds for all of them, in which they could rest and recharge. And while they rested, she dispatched
roomsful of tiny robot nurses holding tiny pillows to smother each one in its sleep.

Perhaps I will be a lover, she thought.