

Summary: Humans want to colonise Tselzry, so they do. Unfortunately for the Iniri ambassador "Harry", the humans don't tend to listen. So due to Earthman's goading, Harry becomes from his people, and must either be claimed as Earthman's mate, or die. Contains: slash, reference to non-con, male pregnancy, fluff/romance, action and adventure, sociological/religious discussion, and no spell check in first few chapters. All from Earthman's point of view.

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Chapter 1- The Plant (tm) by Zuzanny

Author's Notes:

This fic can also be found at [fictionpress.net](#), [adultfanfiction.net](#), and <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UnnamedEarthExplorer/>
April 05 2004

Thoughts of an unnamed Earth Space Explorer

by Zuzanny

Part 1

The Iniri are and interesting people. Interesting to look at and interested in us. They have a childlike curiosity that is indearing, but also tended to make you forget you are talking to an adult. At least I think they are all adults. It's kind of hard to tell. It's hard to tell a lot of things about them.

I was sitting across from the Iniri 'ambasidor' or 'tour guide' depending on the situation. Our table was closest to the shuttle window and he pressed his face against the superplex to see his jungle from a different angle I guess.

Harry is what we call him, since his actual name is rather complicated. He doesn't seem to mind that we don't have the vocal cords, just shrugs and smiles his bright smile. He can speak English almost perfectly now, just clarifying his understanding occasionally. Iniri are incredibly fast learners.

The Iniri, are as I said before, interesting to look at. Harry is pale skinned, almost porcelain white with hair to match. His ears are in the same place as we humans, but are shaped more like a cats, complete with dark markings on the tips. His eyes are sort of violet with green specks. Rather spectacular. (HA!) He is shaped with the lean muscle of a teenaged boy, with his hair hanging low to his backside like a girl. From what I have seen all the Iniri look like this, effeminate yet masculine. Perhaps I have only seen the men of their kind. Either that or the women just don't have breasts.

Harry looked back at me over his shoulder and smiled before sitting back at the table. They are amazing really, so human looking despite the differences. I poured him some more water which he savours like it is the finest wine. It must be different taste buds or something. I'll have to ask the meds who examined him a few hours previously. I'm surprised he was not even remotely embarrassed about submitting to a physical, but perhaps he simply had no idea what to expect. Despite being fast learners the Iniri are mild mannered and I would say a tad simple minded.

"So what do you think of our space station?" I asked.

"It's amazing!" Harry replied. "We never knew that traveling through the stars was possible let alone that there could be other races. Your level of technology is remarkable." He fell silent and frowned down at his glass, running a finger tip around the rim.

"What is it?" I ask.

Harry hesitated, then cocked his head to the side giving me an uncharacteristicly serious look. "We have no technology to trade with you, so what is it your people are really after?"

I gave him a small smile. I had once again forgotten that Harry is not a child. "To the point I see." I said and lean back against the chair. "To tell you the truth, we haven't quite decided. Negotiations are still to be held, but we hope to settle a colony here. With your abundant natural resources and our technology, we hope to achieve a mutually beneficial arrangement."

Harry snorted. "And what if we refuse you your colony?"

"Well, you've seen our technology." I leave it hanging. Harry continues to frown. "There is still much time for negotiations." I reminded him.

"I will have to discuss this with the others, you understand?"

I smiled.

Excellent.

I escorted Harry out of the shuttle, down the ramp, to the soft swaying, many colour splattered grass of the small clearing we had landed in. Jungle sprouted all over this planet's land. Space like this was rare unless you didn't blink too often. Harry walked bare foot, wearing loose gray pants and a long sleeved top that looked far too big for him. The fabric shimmered in the sunlight, turning to almost blue when we entered the shade of the trees.

This world was a botanist's paradise and an allergy sufferer's hell. The place was full of flowers of all shapes, sizes and colours. Plants plants and more plants. It was warm like mid spring time. Harry picked flowers as we walked, tucking some into his hair to keep it behind his ears. Little pink flowers the shape of tiny stars. He held one out for me to smell. They are sweet, almost as strong as roses. 'Pop- you-ee' he calls it. I remember that name because of its resemblance to potpourri. Harry takes a small bite out of it, his eyes fluttering with pleasure.

"Try it?" He held the half eaten star on a stick up to me. Innocent eyes looking up with a cheeky grin. A dare. The little imp.

"Why?" I ask. "Will it taste bad?"

"Nothing tastes bad here."

He was right.

Its sweet nectar is also good for stomach aches apparently.

We walked through the jungle for a long time, Harry pointing out plants and their uses to me. I noticed we were walking along a maintained, built up track. To our left was steep jungle covered mountain side, the other turning down to a valley.

"This trail leads up to my village." Harry told me. "We live up there because it's easier to get to the cannapys then."

"What about the valley?" I ask. Harry looked away from me, avoiding my gaze.

"We don't go down there."

Interesting. Perhaps there is land we can use without much protest after all. "Why not?" I ask. "You seem to go every where else."

"True." Harry replied, but did not continue. I prompted for more. "Because it is not safe." With that he continued to walk. I watched him move ahead of me, staying where I was. He stopped and looked back at me, wearing his stern expression. "You do not want your people trying to live down there."

I cocked my head to the side. My turn to be all curious and inquiring. I step closer to the valley and watch his eyes widen with alarm. He came closer in an attempt to stop me. No way that he could if it came to a physical confrontation. I am bigger, stronger, experienced. "Come on, it can't hurt to look. Is there a wild monster of some kind down there? If there is, I have my weapon." I patted the pistol at my side. "I'll protect you."

"Please don't..." He sounded like a small child, all frightened and biting his lip to try and hide it. "It's dangerous-"

"OR," I interrupted. "It's not. Don't tell me you've never even gone down there to look." I taunted him.

"None of our generations have. It's not safe."

"So..." I wrapped one arm around his shoulders and smirked down at him. "You really don't know for sure." Appeal to his curiosity, come one! That's it...

Harry slowly passed me to peek down the easy slope. The jungle makes it hard to see too far, but from the looks of things if there really was some wild carnivorous monster down there it would not have been too hard for it to move up here. Harry is still unsure until I remind him about my weapon, and eventually he agrees to come with me.

We used the trees to help keep our balance on our way down the slope. The ground here was deeply littered with leaves. Each step we took had us sinking almost to our knees. It was a hard slog. Every time I looked across to Harry he was on super alert. His cat-like ears were twitching and his eyes darting about. Harry's footsteps in the foliage were no where near as loud as mine. In fact, if it were not for the fact that he was speaking to me, telling me that he didn't like it down here in the valley, I would not have even noticed his presence. It was strange that here his pale colourings mixed in with the trees.

Eventually we made it down to the valley floor. It went from thick jungle to waist deep open grass space that the sun beamed down upon. There were flowers everywhere here as well, turning the grass blue and pink and yellow. I looked over to Harry, who was looking around wide eyed. He still was not smiling.

"I don't see any wild animals, do you?" I taunted him.

"You generally don't until they eat you." He said wryly. I shot him a grin.

We continued walking and exploring along the valley. It appeared at least two kilometers wide, unsure how long since the valley twisted and turned around the mountains on either side. But it appeared to be beautiful fields the entire way. Odd how the trees stopped all at the same place... Harry pointed it out to me, I had not noted the significance.

The wind blew towards us, a faint sweet scent on the air. Sort of like Daffne, but not. The noise Harry made caused me to pause and look at him. He had moaned. Yes, moaned. It was soft, but his expression still held the glazed, pleased look. His eyes were hooded, there was a definite pink to his cheeks which I had never seen before. And he was panting.

"Harry?" I asked. He blinked, and looked at me, mouth open slightly as he continued to pant. He ran a hand through his long hair, lifting it from the back of his neck. "Are you all right?"

"We should..." He took in a deep breath of the fragrant air and made another one of those erotic noises as his eyes fluttered. Then he began moving, continuing in the direction we had been heading in. But this time he almost looked like he was floating. And he began stripping off all his clothes.

Something was not right here.

"Harry?" I picked up his discarded shirt then pants. He ignored me. I chased after him, trying to engage him in conversation and finding only vacant eyes. What was this? What was going on? Why was I not effected? Was he having a joke at me? Maybe there really was a monster down in this valley. A mind controlling wicked creature. A witch? Why hadn't I insisted on specifics? I pulled out my pistol and kept beside him as he waded towards a pink patch in the grass. Towards a huge open petaled pink flower of some kind spread across the ground. Tendrils

spread out in all directions, so innocent really, if Harry had not walked right to the centre of this flower and stopped. Even more innocent if the tendrils and petals had not started to curl up like a flower at night. I saw the tendrils moving around Harry, sliding up his legs as the petals folded upwards. And he just stood there. The fly-trap-like flower's petals closed around Harry's naked hips, making it look like he was wearing a many layered pink skirt.

Suddenly he arched his back, flinging his head back, and let out a noise that could only be described as sexual. Impassioned moans and sighs filled the air while Harry arched and straightened, arched and straightened, over and over. He ran his hands through his hair some more, lifting and holding his hair up off his neck with such eroticism I found myself sweating. Hell, the whole scene was hot! I found myself imagining Harry back in my room, making these same noises and moves while he straddled me.

I had to shake those images from my mind, and wipe the saliva from my mouth. I tried to pry the petals open, to hack them, shoot them. They were impervious to me. I called in for a rescue team. What if this 'plant' was eating him?!

And Harry rocked, moaning. There was nothing I could do but watch.

He made a short, surprised gasp when there was movement in his belly. I saw it, like a limb moving inside him, a snake sliding around, a tendril. He arched, cried out, and fell forward, silent and limp. Only the plant petals held him up. After a few moments they began to open, letting a pink substance like jelly leak through the gaps. Harry slumped forward against the front petal his lower half covered with the jelly, and tendrils wrapped around his legs. On particularly thick one, to my horror and embarrassment, was up between his legs, between his buttocks, inside him. I couldn't tear my eyes away as it slowly began to retract, all of the tendrils sliding from him. Harry whimpered slightly as it slid from his body, leaving a gaping, jelly leaking hole behind, and disappeared in the centre of the flower.

Harry lay still. I watched the plant warily and as quickly as I could, gathered him into my arms and pulled him away from the plant's reach. I cradled him against my chest, using his pants to try and wipe the jelly from his legs, secretly hoping that the shuttle would hurry up and get here and rescue us! Harry was breathing, and by all appearances asleep. A blush still staining his cheeks.

What the hell was that plant? Was that what the Iniri avoided the valley for? What did it do to him?

The wind whipped up with a dull roar, and I looked up to see the shuttle craft landing. I wrapped Harry's clothes around him as best as I could to try and give him some decency and lifted him up, one arm under his knees the other behind his back, and carried him towards the shuttle. I kept my eyes open for more patches of pink. When I looked back at the plant it had shrivelled to a dry husk.

I lay Harry on the emergency table as the shuttle took off, whispering apologies that he couldn't hear before trying to inform the medics about the situation. How do you say tactfully that the embassador of another planet was raped by a plant before your eyes and you could do nothing to stop it? In fact, you caused it?

To be continued

End Notes:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/UnnamedEarthExplorer/>

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Chapter 2 - Consequences by Zuzanny

09 April 2004

Big thanks to Dee for being my beta!

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer
by Zuzanny

part 2

In less than an hour after we were aboard the shuttle, Harry was awake and looking around with confusion. When questioned he said he had no memory of coming aboard again, and virtually no memory of our walk in the valley. My superiors told me to tread lightly, but to try and find out what that plant was. The joys of being an underling.

"What is the last thing you do remember?" I asked from his bedside.

Harry was dressed in a green med lab gown, tucked under the blankets like a sick child. But he was radiating the same energy and life he had before. Nothing like what I expected after what I witnessed. The only difference in his appearance now compared to before was that his cheeks were still flushed a tell tale pink. But instead of giving him a fevered look, it just made him appear more like a healthy human teenager.

"The last thing I remember is..." He looked into the air like it held the answer there, frowning as he concentrated. "Is... Hmmm... We were climbing down the side of the valley, and then... you said something about wild animals!" He beamed up at me. I nodded slowly.

"Anything after that?"

Again he concentrated. It took longer than the last time. "there was... a... smell." He said quietly, as though he was not quite sure.

"Yes?" I leaned forward. "Can you identify it?"

"I..." He shook his head sighing. "No. I can't remember it, just the fact that I smelt it. I don't think I have smelt it before though."

That was interesting, knowing about his knowledge of the plant life on this planet. "How do you feel?" He gave me a confused look.

"Fine. Why? What's going on?"

"Um, there was an incident in the valley." I said cautiously. "You had a run in with a plant which resulted in you, uh, loosing consciousness."

He blinked, then shrugged. "Okay, but I'm fine now. Did it effect you?"

"Nooo..." I drew it out, images of Harry throwing his head back and crying out with pleasure flashing though my mind. "Just you. We don't know how badly it has effected you, so please let us know if anything is not quite right with you, okay?"

"Well," Harry looked at me impishly. "I am hungry,"

I smirked at him. "You're always hungry." I said with affection and ruffled his hair. "You want some rations?" He nodded his head vigorously. Harry seemed to consume anything that did not move, especially liking tomato flavoured things. He said that they don't have an equivalent here. Tomato and fish are not present. Or at least not eaten. He doesn't like fish for food. He tried it, but almost turned green. Especially when I told him what it was. I wonder what their fish are like for him to react like that? But as I have said previously, perhaps the Iniri have different taste buds. I picked down the tins of tomato and sausage bolognaise sauce, and some other things that he

likes and carried them back to his room. Only the Iniri ambassador was not in his room when I got there. I checked the bath room and he was not there. Not in the showers. Not in the mess hall. Not in the med lab. Finally I went to the bridge to ask the computer to track him down. He was outside in the flower fields munching away on the grass.

Sigh.

"I thought you wanted some rations." I said as I got closer to him. His back was to me, and he barely acknowledged me. He simply stiffened at my voice, then went back to picking flowers. These ones were blue with little yellow stripes in the middle of the petals. "Harry?" I asked when I was just a little behind him.

"I changed my mind." He said flatly still without turning to face me. I frowned. Did I detect a note of anger in his voice?

"Are you alright?" He turned to glare back at me over his shoulder, baring his teeth like a wild animal, before launching up at me with a roar. I was so shocked that when I was winded and on my back it took me a few seconds to realise he was attacking me! Punching and clawing at me with such fury and strength that was surprising considering his size and build.

"YOU!!!" He yelled at me while I blocked his gouging my eyes out. "YOU DID THIS TO ME! YOU!!!" I yelped as he slashed my cheek with his finger nails, and then shifted my weight under him, and managed to grab hold of his wrists in my hands preventing him from damaging me further. I wrapped a leg around his hip and rolled us over so that I was on top of him. Harry fought and struggled under me, screeching and wild-eyed.

"Stop it." I hissed down at him, holding his hands up near his head. Instead he tried to take a chunk out of me with his teeth. I lifted up my weight and then sat down upon his stomach heavily. Harry let out a gasping grunt as he was winded, and all the struggle went out of him.

He lay gasping and staring up at the sky for some moments, I too panting at the effort it had taken. It took me some moments to realise that I was aroused at the position we were in, and at the beautiful picture Harry made below me, like a conquered maiden. Harry looked me in the eyes for less than a second before closing them and looking away, whimpering pitifully. Tears started forming as he whimpered, and soon they were draining down his face into the grass. I cautiously relaxed my hold on him, still keeping him pinned by me sitting on him. I wiped the blood from my face with a grimace.

"Like to tell me why you attacked me?" I asked coldly. He glared up at me, teeth clenched as his breath hissed out.

"You attacked me first." He growled. "I was merely returning the favour."

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about?!" I think the expression used to describe the way he said that is incredulous. He started struggling again under me. Oh yeah, keep that up baby, just some place more private, yeah? "Look at me!" He cried. "I'm tainted!"

Quoi?

"Did you think I wouldn't notice because I was unconscious?" He continued ranting. "Well granted I didn't at first, but that's beside the point. Tell me why you did it? Was I was an easy target, all unconscious on the ground was it simply that you were not getting any from your own mate? Why? I trusted you!"

"Hang on, hang on. Are you accusing me of raping you?!"

"Are you saying I consented?!" At that I climbed to my feet and stepped back to allow a respectable distance between us. He used his elbows to lift himself up, still glaring hatefully up at me.

"Harry, I did not rape you. I would never harm you like that."

"What's that in your pants then." I took in a deep breath, willing both calmness and away of arousal. "I did not rape you. It was the plant in the valley."

He was on his feet and in my face. "WHAT?! Do I look stupid? Do you think I would not KNOW if there was that kind of plant here?"

"Not if you had never been in the valley before. And even if you had, you obviously don't remember it or you wouldn't be throwing accusations at your friend!"

Harry looked uncertain at that. Then upset. He hung his head for a moment before looking back at me with such misery that it made my heart clench. "I can no longer represent my people." He said quietly, before turning to walk the trail to his home. I caught his arm to stop him.

"Why not?"

He pointed at his face. I could see nothing wrong. "I am tainted. My people will never accept me now. Don't worry, a new representative will arrive within an hour. Goodbye." He wrenched free from my grip and ran into the jungle. I watched him go, refusing to shed the tears of my own.

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Chapter 3 - Enter Ford by Zuzanny

April 2004

More big thanks go to Dee for being my beta!!! :)

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny)

part 3

The new Iniri ambassador was taller than Harry by maybe a few inches, and wore shimmering green clothes instead of the gray Harry had worn. Other than that this one looked virtually the same as Harry. Hell, I thought it was him at first. Only this one was colder, more formal. His eyes were more green than violet too. And I suppose when you really look closely the tips of his ears and the shape of his chin are different and instead of his hair being loose the top is pulled back and braided together leaving the majority loose down his back. This one wears his hands in his sleeves like a monk. This one has had his name shortened to "Ford" because of how long and complex his full name is. He speaks slower than Harry, cautiously at times, and his eyes are always darting about as though searching out a threat.

"I apologise for the delay." Ford bowed his head slightly at me. "With your approval negotiations can continue."

"Before we do," I said. "What has happened to Harry?"

Ford blinked, then his eyes narrowed. "Why do you ask?"

Be diplomatic. Come on, you can do it. "Because, he left in such a state that he was unable to

communicate why he was leaving. I consider him a friend, so if he is un-well... Please, I need to know."

The ambassador was not impressed. "You say that you are his friend and yet..." He clamped up.

"Look," I said, almost deciding screw political correctness and all that crap. "there was an incident involving Harry and a plant. Then next thing I know he 's running away from his position and you're here instead. If you could explain what is going on it would really be helpful."

Ford escorted me up the hill to the village. It looked exactly the same as it had the last time. When we passed the spot Harry and I climbed down to the valley below I shied my eyes away with shame. The things Ford explained to me made me furious at myself. I needed to make things right.

"Plants may aid in getting and keeping a child in our bellies," Ford had hissed at me when I told him what had happened to Harry. He didn't believe me. "but they don't put them there!"

Right. I must have seriously missed something, considering the amount of time I spent watch-huhm- observing Harry.

Strange that I had not fully realised why there were no strictly "female" Iniri before Ford gave me a blank look when I asked how Harry , being MALE could get pregnant. But now I knew.

NOTE TO SELF: Iniri are both male and female in one. Male on the outside, female on the inside.

Hmmm...

The village houses were made of mud brick and branches for the walls and woven palm-like leaves for the roves. Some Harry/Ford look-alikes were wandering around the huts wearing red and yellow, picking plants and tending small fires. When they saw us, the yellow wearers all stood protectively in front of the red wearers, who I noticed all had bellies expanded to various proportions. I looked up into the trees and saw a huge city of tree-houses bridged together with intricate rope ladders. There were hundreds of Iniri up there, poised, watching Ford and I walk through the little land village. It was interesting. The Iniri in the trees were all dressed either in gray, green blue or violet.

I remembered what Ford told me about the social structure of the Iniri, and was surprised I had not picked up on it before. When Harry had first come aboard he had completely avoided anyone wearing white or violet, but then when they were wearing other colours he would be incredibly friendly.

Ford had explained that the colour coding was to avoid confusion. Grey wearers were un-mated, un-bonded, and not looking to get a mate. Violet were seeking a mate. Blue were bonded with no infants, green widowed and still in mourning.

Ford refused to comment about why he was wearing green.

Red were "with child", their bonded mates wearing yellow. For the safety of the pregnant one and the child they then moved down to the ground.

White were out casts, the tainted. In other words anyone who got pregnant without being bonded. The white wearers were housed in huts further out of the village beside the cliff face. According to Iniri law if a white wearer was not claimed either by the father of the child or another willing to take responsibility for them (which was incredibly rare), they were expected to throw themselves over the edge of the cliff to purify their social status or some such rot. They only had three days.

There was no way I was letting Harry anywhere near that cliff.

Harry was dressed head to toe in white, kneeling in the center of the hut, head bowed like he was asleep or praying. I don't know what kind of deity or what ever the Iniri worship. I had never asked. Ford stayed outside the door of the hut while I entered.

Harry's back was to me and if he knew I was there he only hunched over further. I lowered myself to my knees behind him and gently lifted the white square of silk-like fabric from the top of his head. I placed the fabric beside us, and he stiffened as I began running my hands through the soft locks of his hair. I separated his hair into three segments like Ford had told me and began to plat it into a long, long rope. It took a long time as I was not at all practised in the art of hair styling, but eventually I reached the thinning ends almost down to his backside. I pulled the little leather ribbon Ford had given me out of my pocket and tied the ends off.

Harry had sat still through all of this, but as soon as I released my hold on his hair he turned his violet-green eyes to look at me over his shoulder, glittering with tears. The rest of his face was hidden behind the same silky material like a veil. He then turned his body around to completely face mine and bowed down laying his forehead against my knees. I patted his head gently, and we stayed like that for what seemed like a year. Then Harry sat up. I took the veil from his face and lay it on the ground with the other material.

"Why?" He asked, voice thick with emotions. I smiled and stroked his still pink cheek slowly.

"Because I like you." I said. "You shouldn't have to die for something that was not your fault." He was about to protest, but I cut him off. "Not another word about it." I said sternly and he obediently shut his mouth, nodding his head and lowering his eyes. I lifted his chin up so that he would meet my eyes. "I want to make things right for you. Will you accept me?"

He searched my face for a few seconds before lowering his eyes again and leaning forward to hug my chest. "Yes." I barely heard him sigh. Even so, I felt my heart skip and my lower bits flare up. I wrapped my arms around him, squeezing and encouraging him to slide his arms around my waist.

"Come on," I urged him to his feet. "You don't belong in those clothes."

Ahem.

Ford met us out side the hut, expression grim as usual, but now holding out lengths of yellow and red cloth to us. Harry bowed his head in thanks and I wrapped the red cloth around his shoulders. He clung to it, hiding like a scared kid wrapped in a blanket. I wrapped the yellow one around my shoulders and then placed a protective arm around his shoulders as we escorted him out of the ground village and back down the hill to my shuttle.

Once we were out of the village and onto the path home I let Harry go frolicking for flowers as was his want. It was strange watching Harry flutter back and forth along the path gathering his plants and knowing according to Iniri law he was basically now my property. I was shocked at how... arousing the idea of it was. Foreign and yet enthralling. Imagine the things I could do to him. The things he would let me do because "it was his place"... But only because of that damned plant. If not for that, Harry would still be wearing gray. What will my superiors think?

Ford and I walked in silence watching Harry.

I wish I had understood the significance of the clothes beforehand. I wish I had bothered asking.

"Did you ever get a chance to uh, wear the red?" I asked the new ambassador. He frowned, eyes narrowing and mouth becoming a thin line.

"Once." He said. I waited, but he refused to say more on the subject.

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Chapter 4 - Claiming and Saving by Zuzanny

17 April 2004

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

By Zuzanny)

Part 4

I watched Harry walking along the edge of a huge gorge, deep as the earth was wide and sharp as though it had been carved out with huge knives. The wind whipped through his long white hair and stirred up his white clothing around him like it was a living thing. He drifted along the very edge like a tight rope walker, looking down as he went. When he finally looked up at where I was there was a small smile on his lips, but it didn't reach his eyes. With out a word he crossed his arms over his chest and leaned backwards. Before I could take one horror filled step towards him he plunged, like a dying bird, into the inky darkness below.

I gasped as I came awake, my heart beating so loud, and sweat coating my back and face. My eyes adjusted to the darkness and I realised I was safe in my quarters, my blankets kicked off my bed at my side. I took deep breaths willing my heart to slow down and my nerves to settle. But after that dream they wouldn't. I cursed and pulled myself out of bed and hurriedly dressed in the previous day's track suit. Who cared if it was not my uniform. It was not like we had any superior officers aboard to tell us off.

I hurried to the med bay to check on my Harry.

I sighed with relief when I found him just as I had left him. Actually better than I had left him. He was curled up on his side asleep, one hand close to his mouth like he was sucking his thumb. Gentle snores emanated from him and I smiled as I saw the pain lines were gone from under his eyes. He really was adorable asleep.

I signed in at the door and sat at his bed side, stroking his fine hair gently. It was tied up in the braid again. I sat watching and stroking him for a long time, lulled into relaxation by his gentle breathing, when I noticed the blush on his cheeks was gone.

Shit.

Ice cold. Pain. Panic. Are these tears in my eyes?

Iris, the medic, poked her head in, catching my attention and motioning for me to come with her. I did as she asked.

"What the hell is THAT?" I asked as she held up a jar filled with fluid and something that I would have thought was an ordinary plant bulb if it wasn't about the size of an apple and undulating with it's roots and tendrils like a jelly fish or... some kind of... I don't know. Seeing it swimming around in the jar was creeping me out.

"This," The medic explained. "was what we removed from your, uh, from Harry's intestines."

"Shit." I breathed with disbelief, my eyes widening. Iris placed the jar down on her desk with a plunk. The bulb-thing shot up to the top of the fluid at the bump, then started fluttering around again.

"You'll be pleased to know that we got all of it, so there will not be a repeat of yesterday." I nodded, eyes glued to the little... creature. This thing. This thing was what caused Harry to come here again, and to become outcast from his people. I wanted to stomp it to bits. "From the test I've run I discovered that this little bugger stimulates the hormones in such a way to give the appearance of pregnancy."

I peered in closer to the critter. "Plant baby." I said. "What would have happened if you didn't remove it? If it was there any longer?"

Iris didn't even need to think about it. "At the current rate of growth it would have burst Harry's intestines open causing mass bleeding and infection. If Harry lived through that it would have been to immense pain, and his stomach juices would basically would have eaten him, inside out. In short, a long, slow, painful death."

It was hard to imagine that there could have been worse pain than what Harry had gone through last night.

Yesterday...

I showed Harry into my quarters, now OUR quarters, watching as he absently rubbed his belly. He sat down on the bed, and gave me a look that was so defeated, so fearful that it made my heart break.

"Uh, do you mind waiting here for a few hours?" I asked him. "My shift starts soon, and I have to discuss our arrangements with my superiors."

He just ducked his head and nodded, hand still pressed to his guts.

"Is everything alright?"

He sent me a sad smile. "I'm fine." He said quietly, waving me off. "Go do what you do."

I wasn't convinced, but I wasn't going to argue with him. "Feel free to look at and use everything." I told him. "There's some tomato puree on the bench."

He gave me a slightly warmer smile then. I ruffled his hair and left.

My shift at the computer console was particularly slow and boring. Monitoring radiation levels and weather patterns and bio-gasses is only interesting if there are fluctuations. Today it was flat normal.

My superiors barely twitched an eye brow when I checked into the space station out in neutral space several squillion clicks THAT way via com line. They were like "Uh-huh. So you own an Iniri now. Huh. Well. Try not to (vague wave in the air) get it dirty, or what ever."

I was surprised that they were so supportive.

I played "Space Invaders 10,000" while I watched the seconds tick backwards.

I didn't see Ford around, but he was busy catching up on the negotiations, and it really wasn't him I wanted to see anyway.

Finally my shift was over and it seemed like seconds later I was back in my quarters. I walked in and the bed was messed, covers thrown on the floor. The vid was showing static, it's movie reached the end, other movie disks were scattered around on the floor in front of the viewer. The tomato puree had not been touched. There was an acidic smell in the air.

"Harry?" I called out, slowly looking about. "Are you here?" A small sound came from the ensuite bathroom. The door was ajar and there was Harry, curled up in a tight ball on his side on the floor in front of the toilet. He was whimpering mindlessly and shivering, lying in his own vomit and waste. The smell almost made me join him in the vomiting. Holding my breath I pulled out some towels and covered him up with them, then ducked out to call in the medics (and breath).

Back in the bathroom I tried to get Harry to talk to me but he continued whimpering. "Have you hit your head?" I knelt beside him and ran my fingers over his skull. Nothing seemed wrong there. I traced down his spine until I reached the middle of his back where he jumped at the contact, making a sharp pained noise. I continued down, tracing down his legs and finding no broken bones. I pried his arms away from his middle (Which was rather difficult) and he just about jumped through the roof when I lightly traced the hard bulge in his stomach area. I swore to myself and slid my arms under his shoulder to lift him to sitting. Harry gave me a pitiful look, tears and vomit plastering his hair to his head and neck, then vomited all over the both of us. "It's alright, it's alright," I chanted softly, getting an arm under his legs and clambering to my feet. Over to the shower I took us, bracing his legs up with my own knees while I reached out and turned on the shower. I rocked and whispered things to him and lowered to sit on the base of the stall. Harry pressed his face against my shoulder as the warm spray cleansed us both. His eyes were very glazed and I wondered if he did hit his head after all.

Harry continued his whimpering, every few moments bringing up more bile. Black bile. Tinted with red. Not good. I started peeling the clothes from his body when there was pounding at my door. "We're in here!" I yelled and the medics spilled into the room and took over from me. I don't remember much after that, I was shaking so badly I could hardly stand up. The medics asked me questions and I could hardly think let alone answer. I kept my eyes on Harry as he was carted away to the med bay.

And it was all because that little creature currently swimming around in the jar on Iris' desk was shoved up inside him.

I think Iris saw the fury in my face because she ordered me back to Harry's bedside to wait.

But I must say that seeing the little creature also was a relief. Harry had not lost a child. There was never one there to begin with. No wonder his people were forbidden to go down in the valley.

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Chapter 5 - Explaining and Rest by Zuzanny
23-29 April 2004

This chapter has been reposted after a bit more work. Big thanks to PenpenPerryn for her input! :)

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny)

part 5

I was reading over Harry's medical files when the door to my room chimed. Lo and behold, and to my surprise it was Ford. Same as ever in his shimmering bottle green get up, hands like a monk and hair like a girl.

"What can I do for you?" I asked inviting him in and closing the door behind him. Ford walked into the middle of the room, looking around from where he stood but making no effort to explore like Harry had in the past. I motioned him to the gray standard issue two seater couch and sat opposite him.

"I have come to discuss some things about Harry with you." He said, back straight and whole body shouting WARY!!!

I knodded my head.

"And also to appologise to you."

That was unexpected. "What for?"

Ford looked rather uncomfortable. "For not believing you about the... plant. We had not realised such a spicies existed here."

"Don't appologise." I said quickly. "That's my job. If I hadn't goaded Harry into going down there, none of this would have happened."

Ford knodded sagely. "Harry is still so young. He doesn't yet understand that curiosity is sometimes best left unfulfilled."

"You can't be that much older yourself!" I blurted out.

Ford gave me a faintly amused smile. "I am. I am quite very much older than Harry. That is why I am here now."

I frowned. "What do you mean? How old are you, exactly?"

Again that sly smile, or more precisely, a leaning forward and baring of oh-so-human and perfectly white teeth. "I have been dressed in green for over five of your centuries."

Five centuries. Wha-tha-HUH?! "Don't you mean five years? Or five decades?" Surely it was a misunderstanding of our language.

"No. I know exactly what I mean. I have been studying your time calculations which is somewhat shorter than ours, and I am correct. Over five hundred years. But I am here to discuss Harry, not me."

The mind boggles. "How old is Harry then?" My voice was going squeaky. Ford stood and faced away from me, his hands hidden up his slieves behind his back.

"A little over one century." I just about fell out of my chair. "He is still a child really." He turned to face me.

A hundred years? A HUNDRED YEARS?! No &ing way!

No way I was telling Ford I was not even a third of that either.

I coughed and forced a smile. "You look good for over five hundred."

His mouth twitched, and he abruptly said. "Do not mate with Harry too soon after his recovery."

"Huh?"

"We Iniri live a long time and are incredibly fertile." I almost missed what he was saying since my mind was still swirling over the age gaps. Harry over a hundred. Wow.

"Because of our fertility we breed only once every ten years." Ford continued.

"WHAT?!" I snorted. No way I could wait ten years to get into Harry's pan-uhm, hum. Yeah.

"We breed as a pack, live as a pack, survive as a pack. To over populate would be desasterous to our environment."

I blinked. "Uh...You have orgies?"

"No." Ford gave me a dark look. "We are incredibly territorial about our mates. I was referring to timing."

Ah. "So what about making love?"

He blinked. "Making love?"

"You know, sex." I was fighting to keep from shifting in my seat. Some parts of me were getting incredibly interested in this converstaion. It had been a long, long time. "Pleasure for pleasures sake. Between the ten years."

Ford continued to give me a blank look. "If you wish. However, after Harry is with child you would have to be careful not to injure either him or the child by doing so."

"I don't want to get him pregnant!" I jumped to my feet and backed away, crossing my arms. Talk about a turn off!

"Then what did you claim him for?" Ford growled, eyes narrowing with hostility.

"To keep him from being killed by jumping off a cliff!" I almost yelled, but stopped before anyone in quaters around me could hear through the walls. They are meant to be sound proof, but there have been noises next door at times which make me wonder.

Ford snorted. "So says the human that would kill him just to give himself some pleasure."

"Look." I said shortly. "We humans happen to find pleasure in sex-"

"Hence your over population and destruction of your planet's enviornment."

"So you don't find pleasure in sex?"

"Of course we do. It's just that there are more improtant things."

"Yeah? Like?"

"Living, eating, exploring, living..." His eyes went distant and tender for a few moments before fixing me with an icy glare. I pretended I didn't notice.

"Explain to me why I should wait, and how long."

He sneared. "Don't worry, not ten years, although you could benefit from the wait. It's obvious from your desire of him that you wouldn't wait that long anyway. You human males would seriously benefit from gaining the female reproductive organs and hormones. No doubt it would give you patience and open your eyes to the realities of life."

"May I remind you that it has mainly been the males of our kind that have been responsible for our technological advances-"

"Yes. Your weapons of destruction, the poisons killing your planet and corrupting your children. Your violence in attitudes that demand absolute control over the very females that gift you with life. I have read your histories. They have been extremely enlightening in both what they say and what they leave out."

"How can you read all our histories since we have so many of them and you've only been with us for... a day?!"

Ford gave me a secretive smile. "Only one day? Really."

Oh-kay. Subject changing time.

"Back to Harry please?"

"Yes. Give him some time to get used to the situation and what you expect of him. The fact you desire him must come as a great shock. Teach him your rules, but please be gentle with him. He is still rather young remember. If you hurt him, he will hate you for ever."

And Iniri obviously live a hell of a lot longer than we do. "Of course I would be gentle with him. Why wouldn't I be gentle?"

"It would displease me greatly to see our cultural norms used to hurt and subjugate one of my own." The threat in his voice made my hair stand on end. "However, if Harry will truly be cherished by you, you have my blessing."

I consider myself duely 'Talked.'

When it was time to bring Harry home from the hospital wing, I brought him a pop-you-ee flower and pair of my track suits to wear instead of the green medical gown. His own clothes were still being cleaned, being made of materials foreign to our prior knowledge. He smiled shyly at me when he took the little pink star flower and ate it. I- and the medics- were amazed to discover a lack of scarring where Harry had been cut open. When asked about it Harry just shrugged. "Don't you humans heal?" He asked, looking shocked.

"Not that quickly." Iris patted his shoulder and shooed us out, then with a swirl of her tied back brown curls set about putting the previously occupied space back in order.

I opened the door to my quarters and Harry walked in before me. Straight ahead was the open space of my quarters, a bedsit really, but bigger. All the standard issue quarters aboard looked like this, if mirror images. To the left after the entrance was the kitchenette with a sink, bar fridge, cupboards with a bench on top. After a small walkway comes the main room, following the wall around the right I have my vid screen and collection of vid-discs, then it continues to the ensuite bathroom.

Against the far right corner was my bed, spotlessly made with crisp grey standard issue sheets and blankets. The middle of the room was where the couch was set up facing the vid screen. Along the far wall there were a few windows dressed in grey slat blinds, through which the swaying branches of the jungle outside could be seen. The floor was thickly carpeted in bottle green with hand sized beige company logos printed all over.

The far right corner housed a storage unit for clothes, blankets, cleaning supplies and any other thing I wanted to keep there. In front of that was a small round table with two straight backed chairs. There was some really great light in that corner since it was right next to a window. The only real colour in the place (apart from the carpet) were the two generic prints hung on the wall that I had my vid screen against. They were a set that I suppose could represent vague humanoid shapes splashed with random patterns of colour. Personally I could never understand the whole

"Art appreciation" thing. I like pictures that make sense and are appealing to the eyes, not this modern post apocalyptic post modern random crap. But I'm rambling.

I closed the door after we entered and stood against the wall watching Harry as he climbed up and knelt in the center of the bed. His head was bowed and his shoulders stiff. I sighed and approached him.

I sat on the edge of the bed just watching him as he shuddered as though he was freezing cold. He looked good in my clothes. Of course they were too big on him and the way they hung made him look like a little kid. But still. The blue suited him.

"Harry?"

"Yes?" He replied in a soft, shaky voice.

"Are you afraid of me?" He turned his violet-green eyes to mine, his pupils shrunken with definite fear. "Because you don't have to be." I reached out to ruffle his hair like I used to, and he shrank back.

"S-sorry!" He quickly apologised when I frowned and leaned forward towards my hand. I lowered my hand and he looked absolutely terrified.

"Harry," I said gently but firmly. "Have I ever gone out of my way to hurt you?"

He shook his head no.

"So why are you afraid of me now?"

He bit his lip for a moment before whispering, "I've never been... penetrated... before. Not, you know. Awake."

Ah.

"Neither have I. I'll be gentle." I reassured him grinning. Then I slapped his thigh in a friendly manner and before I could see his reaction got up to make coffee. And tea too. A special blend of flowers and grasses that Harry had previously brought aboard. I'm not sure what is in it except it is extremely sweet (far too sweet as far as I'm concerned) and Harry drank it constantly before "the incident". He watched me owlishly from across the room while I did this, then took the offered cup, inhaling deeply before sipping it slowly. I leaned against the wall drinking my coffee and observing him. After a few sips of his tea he sighed with pleasure and I noticed his posture relaxing, the tenseness leaving his shoulders, a small smile turning up his lips. Even his ears were more... perky. After he finished about half the cup he lowered it and looked across at me still nervous but more relaxed. He leaned on one hand and tilted his head, which exposed his neck quite nicely.

"Well," He said. "shall we get started?"

I couldn't help it. I started laughing. He stared at me with confusion. I came back over and sat next to him.

"It is what you claimed me for, right?"

I ruffled his hair, which he allowed me to do, then I leaned in to breathe in the scent of him. He smelled of spring weather and medical soap and a spicy something that was uniquely him. "I must confess" I said quietly into his hair. "that was part of the reason. I have... desired you from the moment we first met." I sat back and made sure he was paying attention to me. "However, I

understand you don't return my attraction. I'm not going to force you. I 'claimed' you to save your life, not just so you had to, uh, do that. Not unless you really, really want to."

He looked like he didn't believe me. I'm not sure I believed me, but I kept telling myself that it was the truth.

"Where I come from," I explained. "people have a choice about sharing their bodies with their partners. No one has the right to use or abuse anyone. I desire you. I want to make love with you. However I am not going to get upset or even offended if this never happens. You are my friend." I will not mention the little 'talk' Ford gave me. "I care about you a lot." Yeah. That's right.

It was obvious from his expression he still didn't believe me. I sighed. "What about..." He gulped and lowered his eyes again. "The bed."

Ah. Yes. My single bed. "You take it. I'll sleep on the couch."

Instantly relief lit his face up. Ford had explained that their laws stated a 'claimed out cast' or some such, had to stay with the claimer's belongings like a good piece of furniture, unless given express permission to leave on errands. All for fear that the immorality would spread. What ever. As if the claimer was not the cause of it in the first place. Random thought: Do the Iniri understand the concept of rape as we do? That the victim is not at fault, that the rapist is the one to be punished?

I got off the bed and looked through the cupboards for more blankets and pillows and set up the couch. Harry watched me do it with wide eyes.

After laying the bedding on the couch I climbed under the blankets and settled my head against the pillow. My feet hung over one arm rest and my head over the other. Not the most comfortable of sleeping arrangements, but it would do for the night. Harry was still sitting up in the middle of the bed. Not that I could see him through the back of the couch, I hadn't heard him move at all. I began to drift off.

"Do you really mean it?" He spoke up after the silence had settled and I was already half asleep.

"Yes." I groaned. There was the rustling of cloth, then the soft padding of bare feet towards me. I rolled over to find Harry crouched right there, face almost pressed to mine.

"You know," He said quietly, hesitantly, "there really is plenty room enough for two in your bed. And you shouldn't have to give it up on my account."

I stared at him, heart fluttering. I smiled and reached out to him. He leaned forward and allowed me to hug him. He was so warm and smelt so... damn good. It's really hard to explain. It felt like first rains after a drought. Appealing. Wonderful.

I found it hard to settle into the bed with him though. He was still so skittish and I wanted to touch him so badly. But I was good. No wandering hands. And after some shifting to get comfortable Harry himself wrapped his arms around me and settled his head against my shoulder. I felt warmth spread through my body. Not arousal, or body heat, but something warm and fuzzy centered around the knowledge that Harry must trust me at least a little.

We slept.

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Chapter 6 - Nights on Tselzry by Zuzanny

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny (lionette@mailcity.com) minus the spaces

part 6

Nights are quiet on Tselzry (or Sil-sir-ee as most of the crew say. It's Iniri for "here" or something like that.). Not as quiet as it is in space, but I suppose it's different noise. In space, in the shuttles and stations, there is the constant low hum of the engines, high pitch whines from the overhead lights, beeping from machines monitoring the situations, hiss of the life support system... not to mention the noises of human life. But then again I suppose that is actually the noise of being inside a tin can set adrift in the middle of space. Or it could be the sound proofing actually works on outside walls. Mostly.

There are creatures like caccadas and crickets here, the size of my hand and noisy as hell when the sun is setting. A few evenings ago (before 'The Plant'), one of these freakingly huge bugs zooms in and lands slap bang on Cadet Georges' neck. I swear I have never heard anyone shriek the way he did when he thought he was being attacked by mad, ravenous, flesh eating beetles, like in some of those really old movies set out in the areas that used to be desert. Georges shrieked and screamed and danced about, arms flaying about trying to get this green and gold flecked creature off of his uniform (and to stop it from eating him! The horror! The HORROR!). Poor thing couldn't let go even if it wanted to though, because each of its six legs had tiny little claws that it used to climb trees with, and they were all caught in the fabric of Georges' flight jacket. Harry had been quite horrified at Georges' reaction and with some help from the rest of us managed to get him to hold still long enough so Harry could untangle it and carry it away like it was the most beautiful and fragile baby.

Harry had looked so beautiful then with the stars beginning to show in the darkening sky behind him and the pink hues of the setting sun turning his colouring almost human. A glowing, celestial human... cooing down at this defenseless creature with the utmost care. He looked up at me and smiled, his hair being gently lifted in the breeze, and it was like something had hit me in the gut.

But I digress. That huge bug that Harry had rescued was one of these critters that play violin with their legs when the sun is setting. I have heard a few flying creatures that I have not yet seen, but from what Harry has told me they are like bats, also when the sun is setting. And a huge amount of birds all sending out their nesting and warning calls. Maybe even a few animal cries, but I have not yet seen anything to back that up. The point I am trying to make is that once the sun has set it is like someone has turned off a switch and all noise shuts off. There are still elemental noises of course, but so far we have not observed nocturnal life forms. (Which is probably just as well thinking back to that bug).

Now the reason I am referring to night times is because of Harry. Asleep. Against me. Using my shoulder as a pillow. While he was snoring these soft little contented snores, I was lying awake listening to the noises of the night and I heard nothing. I fell asleep to the sound of Harry's breathing, which is a noise that really is rather pleasing. Like the rest of him really. I dreamed about floating in the center of a spinning tin can, which was really perplexing at the time because I knew the can was far too small for me to be fitting inside, let alone floating, but still there it was. There was more to it, I'm sure, so that it actually made some sense, but I can't remember it. The floating was pretty cool though. Zero gravity is one of the most amazing sensations. I think if I ever settled down, the zero g would be one of the few things I would really pine for. Magic.

Anyway...

I was warm, amazingly warm. Warmer than normal and it took me a while to realize that it was because there was a body snuggled up to mine. Our legs were entwined, my breath stirring his white hair. The sun that poured in through the windows lit him up and made him glow with a white light.

Harry looked so beautiful lying there asleep. Relaxed. His eyes gently closed, dark eye lashes casting slight shadows upon his cheek bones. His lips were parted and his breath was warm and

quiet against my skin. His ears were also relaxed. They were cute, cat like ears, and now that I could see closer, they were covered in a fine hair. Like cat's fur but much softer. White with black markings. Splotches like tiny leopard spots. I wanted to touch him, but I didn't want to wake him in doing so. His hair mostly had stayed in the braid which was slung over the pillows, but his fringe and bits of hair were sticking out. I found the thought of extra vacuuming momentarily amusing. (White hair on dark blue uniforms. Heh.)

His ears twitched as I brushed the hair away from his face, but he didn't wake. I continued to stroke his hair, so fine and soft, like the finest silk, and he leaned into my touch with a murmur.

I couldn't resist any longer. I leaned down and brushed my lips against his. I'm not sure what I was expecting to happen, but it sure was not Harry shrieking and flailing about as he struggled out of my reach, all ending with him falling out of the bed with a crash.

"Are you alright?" I peered over the edge of the bed at him all backed up against the vid screen.

Harry looked around him, eyes wide with panic and disorientation. Then his eyes closed and he slumped his shoulders, the fingers of one shaky hand touching his mouth. He took in a deep breath as his body shuddered.

"Good morning to you too." I tried not to sound offended, but I don't know if he was convinced.

"I'm sorry," He mumbled from behind his hand. "I was startled."

I snorted. "Right." I patted the bed beside me. "Come back here."

Slowly Harry stood and shuffled back to climb in beside me. He still had his hand over his mouth. I scooted over to give him more room, then tugged the blankets back up over our legs. I lay back with my hands behind my head while he sat upright and rigid, still touching his mouth. His hair hung down his back like a thick rope and coiled where he sat. I reached out to stroke the braid.

"What's the matter?" I whispered.

"Tingles." He replied, turning his head to look down at me. "What did you do to me?" There was an edge of panic to his voice.

"I kissed you." Simple. No big deal here. The ends of his hair felt nice against my hand as I brushed it back and forth across my palm.

"Kissed?"

"Yes. I pressed my lips against yours."

Harry looked absolutely revolted. "Why?"

I shrugged. "Because I wanted to. Don't worry, I don't have cooties."

"Cooties?!" His voice rose an octave.

"That's right. No cooties."

"But... but... why would you want to do such a thing?!"

I sat up wrapping my arms around his waist, and nuzzled the back of his neck, nipping and kissing his skin lightly. I smiled when I saw goosebumps rising and heard his breathing hitch. "Because it feels nice." I whispered into his ear, then gave the shell of it a lick. He rewarded me

with a small breathy noise and tilted his head to give me better access. "Does that feel nice to you?"

"Yes," he breathed. I could feel his heart speeding up. "But I still don't understand. Why would you want to do... THAT?"

I nuzzled his ear some more, feeling my heat rising when he leaned against me. "It's a way of showing affection." I said. "How do you show each other affection?"

Harry peered up and back at me, his violet and green eyes searching mine. Slowly he stretched himself up and nudged his forehead against mine, turning his head and rubbing his temple against mine. It reminded me of a cat marking it's territory. Not quite as intense as kissing, but it was still nice. Harry gasped shortly when I mirrored his own actions. I imagined purring as I did so. He pulled back, looking almost shocked.

"You really care for me?" He breathed, his expression telling me that was a huge surprise.

"Of course I do." I reassured him, then head butted him some more before lying down and pulling him with me. He lay with his ear against my chest, I rested one of my hands against his hair. I am still amazed at the heat hair can generate. We lay like that for a while, me caressing his scalp, and he stroking my arm around my elbow with his finger tips. I don't exactly know why but I asked, "Do you think I'm ugly?"

"What?!" Harry sat up abruptly carrying an expression that suggested I had just tried to alter reality again. "No! Of course not! Why would you ask such a thing?"

I felt rather bashful at that point. "Well... You're all beautiful. Slender and elegant like a dancer, while I'm well, gruff and hairy. I bet that if you were given a choice you would never have chosen to stay with me if you could stay with one of your own people." Shall I pout now? What about eating worms?

Harry settled back down beside me, his head resting on his hand, shifting to entwine our legs. "I don't think so." He said with all seriousness. "If one of my own people had claimed me I may as well have just thrown myself over the cliff."

"Why?"

His mouth twitched slightly at the side. "I am a Demporei... a... 'Child of the Forrest'. I can not live for long in a small space." I wondered if he meant he was claustrophobic, but he continued. "My body would continue to live as long as it was fed, but my mind would die."

"So, does that mean you would die if I took you into space?" I felt my heart sinking. Tselzry was a nice place -don't get me wrong- but I didn't want to live here if I didn't need to. I wanted do go back to my stations and starships, and maybe even get home world once in a while.

"No,"

Phew!

"not if I was allowed to keep learning and exploring your people and your cultures and your lifestyles?" He asked as though he thought I would lock him in the closet for the rest of his life.

"Okay. That's alright then. But wouldn't you have been allowed to do that with one of your own people?"

He shook his head and rested his head against my chest again. "No, not really." He sounded

sad. I stroked his scalp some more, and I thought I could hear him purring. I smiled when he inclined his head against my fingers, his breathing getting ragged.

"You still didn't answer my question." My voice was husky as I spoke.

Harry twisted his head so that he was grinning up at me, his eyes shining. "I think you're magnificent."

Only his eyes stopped me from scoffing at that. But my ego wanted more. "Really? Why is that?"

Harry rolled his eyes as though it was obvious. "Here was I, plain, ordinary me, picking berries at the edge of the forest when your shuttle landed in the plains. The wind was so strong it knocked me to the ground and I lost all the berries." I smiled at the thought of Harry being knocked onto his backside. "I looked up and saw your shuttle opening, the sun making it glow like a star had fallen into the grass. Then the ramp lowered and out you walked."

I remembered our first landing in that field. I had been the first person out to check the area was secure. I had not noticed Harry was there. None of the scanning equipment had picked him up either, but there is a strong electrical signal of some kind that seems to circulate around the planet that knocked them all out. It took us a while to figure out the weather patterns and how to stop killing all our scanners.

"I had never seen someone with colour in their skins before." He lowered his eyes as though he was shamed.. "We are all the same when it comes to our colour. Only our eyes are different. But you, your people are all different! I remember how the sun made your hair turn almost red, and your skin glow like the sun setting over the mountains. And you are so big! I wanted to get to know you straight away, but the elders frowned upon it." Ah, that did it. Ego is happy. And I was feeling warm and fuzzy.

"What about the others aboard? How did you know it was me you saw first?"

"Easy," He grinned. "You are the only one that looks like you."

"Wow." I breathed, leaning in so I could rub foreheads with him again. He seemed to melt against me. I rolled us so that I held myself above him with our foreheads joined. Harry was panting, his pupils dilated.

"Do... you really think I'm... beautiful?" He hesitantly asked.

"More than beautiful." I replied truthfully. "My words can't describe it. You glow with a light that I can't resist. I'm like a moth to a flame when you're around. Everything about you is so amazing. You shine with life and joy and I want to hold you so much..." I looked down at him, hoping that I was expressing myself right, and not, I don't know, insulting him in any way. I know girls can be funny that way. To my relief he was smiling up at me with wonder. It almost took my breath away. "May I kiss you again?" I whispered hopefully.

"Yes," He breathed. I did. His lips were soft and cool, yet warm at the same time. I lowered my weight upon him, and he wrapped his arms around my neck and back, spreading his legs to make things easier and more comfortable. With one hand I caressed his face, the other I slid under his (my) top to stroke the soft skin of his side and chest. He gasped softly when I brushed my fingers over a nipple, and arched up with a cry as I slid that hand down over his abdomen. I could feel his reaction and appreciation of the situation mirroring mine. Ah-hem.

His chest heaved with his ragged breathing as I started to kiss and nip my way down his throat while sliding the top up towards his shoulders. When I started suckling at his chest he seemed to lose all strength in his arms, and they dropped down by his head. Again I caressed his stomach

and he cried out and arched up into my touch. I chuckled and stroked him there over and over, watching with a smile as he almost went into convulsions. I stopped and he stared up at me wide eyed and flushed (or as flushed as he could get with out being rosey cheeked), gasping for air like he had just run a long way.

"I think," He panted, licking his lips in an innocent way that was so amazingly hot. "That was more than a kiss."

I chuckled some more, and pressed my head against his with my eyes closed. "Did you like it?"

He hesitated, and I opened my eyes to look directly into his. "Yes." He then arched his lower body against mine, with a coy smile on his face. Oh, yes, he liked it. Very much from the feel of things. But I do enjoy being the tease.

"Would you like me to kiss you again?"

In response he grabbed my head and pushed himself up to kiss me. After that we almost tried to devour each other. We rolled around on the bed and struggled for dominance, every now and then breaking the seal of our lips to breath or to whisper things to each other, but most of the time our tongues were entwined like those sea snakes, and we explored each other's bodies with our hands.

I had my hand squeezing the perfect soft roundness of Harry's backside and he was digging his finger nails into my naked back (steadily progressing to naked elsewhere), all the while playing tonsil hockey, when the door to my quarters chimed.

I cursed loudly and pulled away from Harry who lay back against the bed looking very much like someone who had just gone for a tumble in the hay shed. Minus the hay. He continued to lie there, hair messed up and arms flung where they landed, legs parted and only mostly covered by the blankets, pale chest gleaming with sweat. He was so beautiful while he watched me. I almost lent in to kiss him again when the door chimed again reminding my to hurry and pull some clothes on and cover Harry up. I answered the door to find Cadet Georges standing there looking a little nervous and uncomfortable.

"Yes?" I raised an eye brow at him as he looked past me into my room, snapping his focus back to me. Poor, poor Georges. He's just a kid really. Nineteen next summer if I remember correctly. His hair was cut in the customary buz as per the regulations on the station for the men. Women didn't have to cut all their hair off, which was probably just as well considering how every one starts to look the same out here. Georges was still getting used to the fact that even if it is regulations, most of us on the crew don't give a shit. Same goes for uniforms. He's a bit of a grunt, a non-thinker.

"Uh, you're wanted on the bridge. Scanners are picking up something." Georges said. He looked past me into the room for a moment before running back towards the bridge like a scared little kid.

I turned to find Harry standing behind me fully clothed and hair straightened back in the braid. I closed the door and pulled him against me, ravaging his mouth hungrily enough that both of us were getting heated up again before I pulled myself away.

"I've got to go." I breathed against the top of his head. "Duty calls, and all that."

"I know." He replied quietly, and nudged his forehead against mine. "Go have fun."

"Hmph!" I snorted. "Not likely. But how about when I get back we, uh... continue where we left off."

Harry blushed! I swear he did! I had to be the one to pull away so that I could finish getting ready and go to the bridge. Another day at the office. Harry found the rations while I was dressing and together we munched down a protein bar. I kissed him again in the door way before finally leaving to go do some work.

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Chapter 7 - Scent by Zuzanny

Yes, I know this one is a bit too short, but I am a bit hurried at the moment.

September 2004

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny (lionette mailcity . com minus the spaces)

part 7

There were teeth. Iris pointed them out to me with her pen. There, in the freshly dug deep red and black soil were perfectly white teeth. The black soil, Iris told me was where the body had been. The teeth and the black substance was all that remained of the Iniri " " for it was an Iniri's teeth- in the location of The Plant's dried out shriveled husk. The husk had been dug up and right underneath it were the remains. More teeth than Harry had, Iris said. Less than Ford. As if that helped with aging this Iniri more than that. Older than Harry, younger than Ford, both of which only gave estimates of their ages, or partial estimates at best.

Iris squatted in the long grass while others wandered about holding scanners and searching around in the valley for places to dig. The Plant husk had been lifted and lain upon a hovering board to be taken back to the station with us. Iris had this expression of amazement on her face as she explained all about carbon dating and the kinds of food the dead Iniri ate by the wear upon his teeth.

I couldn't help feeling that this could have been Harry.

There was a cry from further down in valley which made us all stand up and pay attention. I had my hand on my pistol before I had even know I reacted, eyes searching around to see if one of my own people had been taken this time. Thankfully none had. It was just Rodgers calling out that he and Elfondso had found another plant.

This plant was closed, like a rose for the night. Same bright pink and huge size as the one Harry and I had met. This one's thick green tendrils were coiled around it on the ground, asleep. I watched it warily, waiting for it to open up and ensnare one of my own people. But it didn't. Rodgers and Elfondso went about digging around at the base of the flower until they found the same blackened soil as at the other plant. The scanners detected the side that the teeth were on, and again they were Iniri in origin. Iris was again talking excitedly about technical things that I was not interested in at that point in time. I was busy looking around at the towering mountains on either side of this valley. It was almost like the entire mountain range had been split in half, ripped apart along the top edges so that there were jagged rock cliffs on either side. I think back to the images I had seen of the Grand Canyon back home world. I had never actually been there, but I suppose that this could be a similar sight, looking up from all this way below. It was beautiful, truly breathtaking. And looking back to all those trees that just stop all at the same line around the edge of the valley had me wondering if this place was prone to flooding. The scanners showed no sign of that in recent events though. At least not the flooding side. There were signs of water running through in small streams, but nothing major.

Back to the latest plant. It seemed like any normal plant at this time. It didn't move, didn't open, didn't try to eat or mate or what ever with any one of my people. Iris was enchanted by the idea of these things, which I found distasteful. Well, I suppose enchanted is the wrong word. But she had some theories connecting these plants to our little Iniri friends which could very much be true,

and I found distressing. I do not consider the Iniri to be flies for a giant plant trap. I don't like that idea at all.

I think I will skip over how most of that expedition went. I find the whole thing distressing. I will say that on that day we found over fifty Plants at various intervals along that kilometer of valley alone. All with teeth and the black soil under them. The ages of those Iniri at the time of their deaths ranged from younger than Harry to older than Ford. To think there would be more all the way along the valley... No I don't want to think about that.

Lets skip back to being back in my room with Harry.

I entered, and he looked up from the book he was reading while being curled up on the bed. I didn't notice what book he was reading, I was too busy pulling off my boots and uniform and dressing in comfortable clothing. Ghosts images of the dead Iniri kept flashing in front of my eyes. Then Harry was behind me, wrapping his arms around my middle and pressing up against my back.

"How was work today?" I love his voice. It's in the middle vocal range, high enough to be female, yet low and husky at times too. Sexy. I leaned back into his embrace. Yes, I could seriously get used to this.

"Interesting..." He was nuzzling the back of my neck in a way that was really distracting. "We, uh... um... found some... some, uh... MORE. Of the. Plants. In the valley. Harry?" I pulled away from him and turned to face him when he started to rub against me like a dog trying to get off. Not that I would mind someone rubbing against me like that when conditions were right, and granted I had said we would pick up where we had started from when I got back, but STILL! This was HARRY, and Harry didn't tend to act like that. At least not normally around me. He was wearing a strange little smile, and his pupils were dilated. And there was that blush. Uh-oh. I backed up some more and he followed me. "Are you feeling ok?" I almost squeaked. My back hit the wall and Harry pounced on me, wrapping his arms around me and rubbing his face against my neck.

"Mmmm..." He purred. "You smell niiiiiiiiiiiiice."

Quick as I could I ducked out from under his arms and gathered all the clothes I had worn in the valley, and then locked myself in the bathroom. I couldn't smell anything on me, but obviously Harry did. I stripped off again and put all my things- including my boots- on to wash, then stepped under the shower, scrubbing hard with the soap. As I washed myself I hoped that Harry wouldn't leave our rooms and proposition any of my crew mates. I don't know if any of them would deny him.

Harry knocked on the door. "What are you doing?" He asked all fallornly.

"Having a shower." I replied. "You can smell the plants on me, and it's making you act... different."

"...Do you need any help in there?"

Sigh. "No thank you. But I will be out soon. Are you hungry?"

"Veery." It came out almost as a growl.

Oh, my! I had to turn the hot off and the cold all the way up with the images that sent through my mind. NOTE TO SELF: When ever dealing with the plants in the valley, wash in the communal showers and change clothes before coming back to Harry. I was in the shower a lot longer than I would usually be, as I wanted to be sure the smell was completely gone before going back out there. I was almost dry when I realised I had not heard Harry out side the door for some time. I

wrapped the towel around my middle and cautiously opened the door to peek out. No Harry outside the door. I crept out and found Harry curled up asleep on the bed, snoring softly. Hastily I pulled on new clothes, turned on the coffee, and then padded over to the bedside. The book he had been reading was turned pages down beside him, and it was a guide to earth plants complete with pictures and uses. I picked it up and put it beside the bed, wondering where on the ship had he gotten his hands on it? I sat down beside him, and stroked the hair from his face. Harry blinked a few times before jerking with surprise.

"Oh!" He said, eyes widening, before smiling. "I didn't know you were back. How was work today?"

"Interesting." I said, not elaborating even when Harry asked more. I didn't mention how he had acted when I had returned, but decided to mention it to Iris when time allowed for it. If all Iniri were effected like that, then I could just imagine what kinds of things my fellow humans would do and get away with. "Are you hungry?" Harry's eyes lit up, and he nodded vigorously. I stood and pulled him up after me. We went off to the mess hall.

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Chapter 8 - Exploring by Zuzanny

jan 2005

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

part 8

"Can I ask you something?" Harry asked me as we sat at our table in the mess hall, our trays full of food. Harry had a plate of spag-bol, some green jelly (which he eyed with constant suspicion), and a glass of wather (which he still savored like wine). I had the same thing, only a bigger helping and a coffee instead of water.

"You can ask me anything." I smirked, clasping my hands together and resting my chin on my fingertips. Harry ducked his eyes shyly for a moment.

"I was wondering...why it is humans have... different hair lengths." The last bit he mumbled quickly like he was embarassed.

"No reason in particular." I replied with a shrug. I thought for a moment, leaning back in my chair. "Well, that is, I suppose it was really to tell the males and females appart."

Harry blinked, his cute confused expression crossed his face, making his eyes cross slightly and his brows crease. "Why would you need to do that?"

"Well, uh. Um. I suppose... Until puberty males and females look pretty much the same, and it would be confusing, you know?"

Harry considered this. "So... it would be like the way we use colours?"

"... I guess so." Why not.

"Hmmm..." He frowned down at his plate, contemplating. "So only the females wear their hair long, brown and curly?"

Iris. I laughed. "Oh, no. We all have differnt types of hair. That depends upon genetics. It's usual that the women and girls have long hair and the men have short, but it is not always the case. Especially in the armed forces. Why are you asking about it?"

Harry watched me swirl the spaghetti around on my fork and then eat it. I smiled around my

mouthfull, eye brow raised, waiting for him to answer.

"It's just... I'm still trying to understand how it works. To be incomplete the way you humans are. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah, I suppose we would seem incomplete to someone who is both."

"Do you... find that strange?" All nervous now. Fingers running around the rim of his glass.

I shrugged again. "Not really. I guess because of the way you look the differences are not really obvious. In some ways you look like a woman-

"My hair length?" He lifted the end of his braid up with one hand.

"Yeah, partially."

"Does that bother you?"

"Nah, why would it?" I reached across to brush some hair from his face. "I like it the way it is."

He beamed and that sent warmth directly into my heart.

Harry set about eating his spaghetti, trying to copy my swirling technique. I enjoyed watching the pleased flutterings that spread over his face as he ate. I could watch him for ever. He paused, fork halfway to his mouth, and looked at the spaghetti swirled around it. "What is this made out of? Is it flesh or plant?"

"Usually plants." I replied. "Wheat, ground and made into a doe, then shaped and cooked with other bits and pieces to make it like that."

Harry raised his eye brows in an "Oh yeah?" expression, then continued eating.

"What would you like to do after dinner?" I asked after a few minutes of eating.

"Could we..." He bit his lip for a moment. Before he was able to continue his sentence, the door behind him opened and some of the crew from the plant expedition entered. Still in their same uniforms. It took approximately 2.5 seconds until the scent hit Harry, making him freeze with the fork halfway to his mouth. Slowly, with hooded eyes, and blushing cheeks, he turned his head towards them. Quickly I reached across the table and grabbed his chin, forcing him to look back at me. His eyes were still turned away, and I had to move around the table to drag him out of there. With all eyes on us (as well as crude comments and some wolf-whistles), I wrapped my arm around his waist and pulled him flush against me with enough force to make him grunt.

He certainly wasn't complaining as I dragged him back towards our room, giggling like a drunk teenager, and whispering suggestive things into my ear, while pressing himself against me. We got some odd looks on our way back to our room.

We were almost there when Harry stumbled, staggered, making a small "Unhf" noise, pressing his hand to his head. I held him closer, steadying him until he got his feet working properly again. Then he was in front of me, holding only my upper arms, taking deep breaths.

"Are you alright?" I asked quietly. He raised his eyes to mine, his glittering with the reflections of the overhead lights, no sign on drug-induced-whatever. He then closed his eyes, stood on his tiptoes and slowly pressed his lips against mine. It was... nice. He grabbed my hand and tugged me towards our door.

"Come on," He said calmly. "I've been waiting for you a long, long time."

Harry lay submissively under me as I set about stripping him. His eyes were hooded, mouth open while he panted heatedly. I could feel his heart speeding in his chest as I unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it apart like I was unwrapping a fragile gift, revealing his smooth skinned chest and his beautiful nipples. They were only slightly darker than the rest of him. I watched them rise and fall with his breathing for a few moments before running my fingers over that oh-so-silky skin. Harry gasped and arched into the contact, eyes shuttering.

"You like that?" I asked with a grin.

"Yes," he breathed, then gave a surprised and pleased noise as I latched my lips upon one and suckled. I didn't stay there long however, instead I kissed my way down his chest, mouthing each of his ribs as well as caressing his sides. Harry has virtually no body hair, just a fine dusting of white fluff. No wiry chest hair, unlike me. I noticed his hair-fluff points inwards towards his center and downwards like an arrow to his groin. He lifted his head as I ran my tongue down that line past his belly button.

"What...are you... doing?" He rasped, pupils dilated.

I smiled at him. "Taking off your pants. Lift your hips."

He lay back down as I loosened the tie and slid the pants down his lifted hips and down off of his legs. I gently parted his thighs and settled between them so that I was face to his groin and his beautiful erection. The head of it was flushed red with blood, a colour I had only seen on his cheeks around "plant" incidents. It stood up proudly, the perfect size to fit in my palm and wrap my fingers around it. Harry moaned, eyes rolling backwards and hips thrusting upwards as I gripped him around the hilt. He continued to moan and whimper as I stroked him up and down. His skin was soft like silk and he was hard underneath that skin like bone or metal. Just like a human.

I paused my stroking to run my fingers through his white pubic hair. Very much the same as a human. Harry laid out before me wantonly, he looked so human. Amazing. I slid my hand up to caress his belly, his resulting moan sending heat flooding through me. I enjoyed watching him convulse when I touch him there.

"What... are you... waiting... for?" He ground out, eyes almost glowing. I chuckled to myself, considering if I should tease him some more. "if... you don't... get on with it..." He growled. "I'll... I'll... I'll go find someone else!"

"Well then, I better get on with it, eh?" He spread his legs wider, tilting his hips as I positioned myself. But I stopped just before entering. Harry flopped down against the matrice making a noise I interpreted to mean "Aw, Come ON?!?" "Wait," I said, placing my hand on his belly, rubbing back and forth with my thumb to make him squirm. "I'm not going to get any nasty surprises, will I?"

Harry blinked up at me with confusion. "Huh?"

"I mean like teeth or any other sharp pointy things?"

"What? NO!!! Now hurry up! I'm going cray here!"

"Alright," I grinned at him and pushed.

Making love with Harry for that first time was amazing. Since I had never even looked at a male for very long before, I really didn't know what to expect. I had always been strictly heterosexual in

my past encounters, so had a bit of sorting out in my head to do first.

For starters, even though Harry was always referred to as a 'he' and not a 'she', I figured it was mainly because of a lack of neutral in my language. Since Harry was neither yet both. I mean, how could a male bare children? It just wasn't logical. However, a female growing a penis was more likely... Hmm. Perhaps I should start talking about "Harriette"... But I'm not sure what he would prefer.

But I'm getting off track again.

Harry was tight and hot and moist. After the first little bit of resistance I was able to slide into him all the way. We paused like that, gazing into each other's eyes and gasping for breath. I smiled warmly down at him and brushed some hair from his face.

"Alright?" I whispered. His fingers brushed lightly back and forth against my shoulders. I adjusted my weight, lowering so that we were belly to belly. Harry purred, tilting his head back to expose his neck. I bent my head to kiss and lick him there. "Ready for more?"

He bit his lip and closed his eyes in concentration, and I felt him squeezing me so tight it made my sight go white and sent sparks of pleasure running up and down my spine. "Mmmm-hmmm..." He purred again, opening his eyes half way, a sly smile turning up the corners of his lips. So I began to move, and Harry came with me. He didn't have the pleasure inhibitions that many human women have, and so he let go, allowing both of us to find pleasure in each other.

I don't know how long we lasted, just that by the end of it I was seeing stars and there was milky fluid between us as we lay gazing and spent. I slid from him and dropped beside him, panting and grinning like an idiot. Harry had his eyes closed, also grinning. The sweat on his skin made him glow. I lent over him to kiss him and he opened his mouth to accept my tongue. Then I sat back and grabbed some tissues to clean our mess up.

After a while I realised something. "How long until, uh, your cheeks turn red?"

Harry cracked open an eye, looking at me from it's corner. "Immediately." He replied. "When... um. Well..."

"Yes?"

Harry looked thoroughly embarrassed. "When my garden pathway is breached and a seed is planted, growth is immediate."

I blinked, trying to translate what he had just said. I knew already that I was fertile. So what was...? Oh. I went red. "Where exactly IS your 'garden pathway'?"

"Um. In there." He tried to shrug it off. "Just at another angle, I guess."

"So I just did your arse?"

He blinked at me, grinning, struggling not to giggle. "And you did it so well!"

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Chapter 9 - Meeting the Parents by Zuzanny

25 march - 22 may 2005

Thoughts of an unnamed earth explorer

by zuzanny

part 9

Harry was deeply asleep when I woke that next morning. Curled on his side with his back to me. His left hand was fisted near his mouth, but I could see he was not sucking his thumb. The sun cast beams of light upon him, making him glow in that almost ethereal way of his, as his hair cascaded over his face, shoulder and pillows. His face was relaxed, eyelashes casting shadows upon his porcelain cheeks, and lips parted slightly. I leaned over him as I observed him, feeling a profound affection filling me and making me grin. I gently brushed some hair from his face and pressed my lips against his brow, chuckling as he sighed softly.

Last night I had not been sure how I would have handled today. But now, seeing him so relaxed, so beautiful, I was happy. I really can't express how happy. I was almost floating around the room.

I ran my hand down Harry's body, caressing from his shoulder down his ribs, down the slight dip of his waist and up again to his hips. Then I slid closer, spooning against him and resting my hand low on his silky belly. He hummed softly, and shifted back against me, tilting his hips in an invitation. I was so hard rubbing against that warm body of his. He didn't open his eyes, but he smiled so I knew he was awake. He reached down and entwined fingers with my hand on his belly, drawing it up to his mouth to kiss and nip at my fingers and knuckles. Then we were sliding, adjusting our positions with little rocking movements, aligning our selves so that I could enter him.

As I slid into his body I noticed he was still slick from last night's activities and still so very welcoming. This time however, we moved slowly, gently, gradually rocking each other to bliss.

From 0800 hours to 1700 hours we (humans) explored the valley again. The digging and taking of samples didn't get as far as the day before, as the number of 'The Plants' (name pending) began to increase. Iris and Rodgers gave me a hard time because I kept smiling to myself. Can I help it if I have such a pleasant bedmate waiting for me? I didn't mind Rodgers' teasing, you get used to it in a tight-spaced community as ours. (Either that or you kill the other person, but so far everyone had been more good-natured towards each other, knowing that the teasing was 'all in good fun'.) However, with Iris I detected a little more than just-for-fun.

"I take it you've started sleeping with him." She stated when Rodgers was off digging. I didn't answer, only raised my eyes brows. Iris sighed and crouched beside me to dig along side me. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"Well, it's to be expected. We are married according to his customs, you know."

She gave me a piercing look. "But what about our customs? Have you thought about what will happen to him once you leave this planet? Or will you be staying behind? I don't think we can take him back to earth with us. At least not yet."

"Why not?"

She rolled her eyes with frustration. "Apart from all the diseases, pollution, and God only knows what else on world that could kill him just from him being there, there's the political and social side of things to be thinking of. So you are married here, but on Earth will your marriage be legal? He's not human, and the conventional laws and social systems we take for granted may not be applied to him. Just think about what would happen if you were killed on earth and he was left there all by himself. Who would take care of him? Who would protect him from all the people that would take advantage of him, not to mention all the scientists that would love to dissect him?"

"Like you?"

She smiled slightly. "I see him as an amazing, sentient being that shares 99.9 percent the same genes as we do. Truly fascinating. Unfortunately many of my colleagues are renowned for their... detachment in regards to test subjects. I may want to study and learn from the Iniri, but I don't plan to torture and destroy them to do it."

We spoke for some time longer, Iris telling me things that I should have already thought of, and wished I could just ignore. Frankly I was glad when she was called away by one of the grunts so I could continue to pretend everything would be fine. Even so, I knew what she said was true.

Rodgers, Elfondso and I took the Mini Bus (our pet name for the ten man shuttle craft) to scout further along the valley, gliding over the tops of the plants as they really began to thicken. We followed the valley, taking over an hour to get past the great peak that Harry's village was on, the base of which was where the scanners told us the plants were the thickest. I wondered if this was because there had been so many infected by the plant and jumped as their law states they have to? Looking up and up and up, shielding my eyes as it was close to high noon, I tried to calculate in my head the trajectories needed for such a feat. There was an awful lot of bodies if that were so. And the positions of all the plants did not sit well with this theory. Even with the blasting winds that you would expect at that height, the distances of the further ones were just too far. Then we were past the mountain, continuing through the valley just to see what was there.

We did not notice at first, but after a few kilometers, the number of the plants began to decrease again, until they were sighted occasionally as pink splotches in the high green grass. Then they were gone. We scanned the area and found no more. Just for kicks we landed by one of these outer ones, approaching it with caution in case its tubular sleeping self began to open. But it didn't. The soil was very red as we dug, that was until we hit the black ground.

The three of us all looked back in the direction we had come, realising that whatever had happened here had killed hundreds of thousands of Iniri.

"Let's go back." Elfondso said quietly. And we did. We didn't talk on the way back. Rodgers flew like he had tunnel vision. But some peculiar part of my mind noticed that all the plants were the same size, their leaves the same, petals the same height and colour, the thick green tendrils that tangled around each other all over the ground like giant roots were all the same thickness and length. This morbid mind of mine wondered if all this could have happened at the same time. I would have to talk to Iris about it. And Harry too.

"What can you tell me about the valley?" I asked Harry that afternoon (after I had scrubbed myself clean in the communal showers, and of course, ordered every one else to do the same.)

"We're not to go down there." Harry shrugged as he looked out the window of our quarters. I came up behind him and wrapped my arms around him. Harry melted back against me with a sigh. I kissed the top of his head, breathing in his scent.

"Why? Do you have any legends or stories about it?"

"No," Harry replied tilting his head so that I would nuzzle his ear. Then he turned to face me. "But I am Dempore and very young." He said it like that was a bad thing. "Why don't you ask Ford. He is older than I, and has traveled the whole world."

Interesting. I had not pictured Ford being the traveling type.

"Maybe later," I said huskily, enjoying the way his head was tilted back and he was panting slightly, pupils dilated. I pulled him flush against myself and hungrily crushed my mouth to his.

After some 'quality time' with Harry, I left him sleeping with the sheets tangled erotically low on his hips, and set off to find Ford.

But the bugger wasn't on board any more, was he?

Harry was sitting up in the bed when I returned, blinking at me like he had just woken up... which might have been true. He looked like he wanted to ask me something, but then he didn't. He looked out the window instead.

I closed the door, unbuckled my belt and kicked off my boots. Then I was crawling up the bed to his side.

"Hey," I said quietly rubbing his cheek with mine. Harry turned his head back to me and I kissed him. "What's up?" Harry looked uncomfortable, eyes lowered to the sheet as he nervously ran his fingers through the tail end of his hair. He even bit his lip. I reached out and lifted his chin to get him to look at me. "Tell me." I said gently.

"I was wondering..." then quickly said, all in one breath : "and you don't have to say yes or anything, because it is your choice and if you say no then I'll do what you say... but I was wondering if we... could go... visit my parents?" He looked so hopeful and yet so easily crushed at the same time, big eyes turned up at me in that classic puppy-dog expression. I had no intention to say no, and didn't question him about why he would think I would say no. Instead I grinned, ruffled his hair, and told him to get dressed so we could go visiting.

Dressed in blue- myself in jeans, button up shirt and company bomber jacket, Harry in his native style with fabric that shimmered a purpleish in the shade of the forest- we ascended the mountain side again. Harry was excited, picking flowers and twisting them into the braid at the back of his head, dancing around the path in front of me, singing something teasingly in his own language. I snatched a hold of him as he gave me a 'come hither' smile and pressed our bodies together in all the right places.

"You seem very happy right now." I breathed huskily. He grinned at me, giving me a quick kiss on the lips before pulling away to dance around some more. "I take it you miss your parents?"

Harry did a cartwheel. "Mmm-hmm! They will be so excited to meet you! They always thought I would either mate with Theorn or no one at all. Oh! You will have to meet Theorn as well! He'll probably try to challenge you for me, but don't worry, he always does things like that in jest."

Blink blink. "And why would he challenge me for you? Who is he when he's at home?"

Harry rolled his eyes at me, grinning. "He's my best friend. We've known each other since we were pods. We used to do everything together. He's the one who pulled me out of the pool when the Jackre caught me and took my arm."

"W-what?"

Harry was walking beside me now, and pulled the collar of his top down enough to reveal his lovely left shoulder. For a few moments we stood still while he concentrated and ran his fingers over the white roundness of his arm. "Somewhere... Hmmm..." Harry shrugged and pulled his clothes back the way they were before. "It doesn't matter now. I was lucky that it only took my arm. Our heads don't grow back. Do Human head grow back?" He was looking up at me with his big, wide, eyes, curiosity that I was so used to making him once more a child in my mind.

"Nooo... But I take it your limbs do?"

Harry nodded brightly, then his smile faded. "I hope Theorn doesn't challenge you. Ever since I lost my arm that time he has been really protective of me. I hope he understands that I am happy with you."

"Are you?" I was very serious. If Harry was not happy after even these few days together, I was prepared to let him go... Especially after Iris' chat. Only if that was what he wanted though. Harry gave me a sly look and wrapped his arms around my neck.

"Verry." He purred.

Heh. Not so childish after all...

On the way up Harry told me about the sink hole on the other side of the mountain that he and Theorn had gone to play at when they were around ten years old, containing a monster of some kind. From Harry's description of the teeth and shape it made me think of a combination of a crocodile and a great white shark. Razor sharp, pointed teeth and lots of them. Wide as a man, and long as ten of them. Harry had been climbing a tree at the edge of the sink hole when the thing pounced out of the shrubbery, jaws snapping shut with his arm inside, and started dragging him towards the sink hole when Theorn dropped from another tree onto it's back, and began to beat it around the head with a branch. Just as it's tail reached the edge of the sink hole Harry's arm tore off. Theorn had collected the herbs to stop the bleeding and carried him all the way back to the village. It had taken a year for his arm to grow back. Harry said that like: "A Whole year! Such a long time! How embarrassing!" I was like: "Wow! Only a year! That's amazing!"

Again he was brooding. "I always need rescuing." He muttered.

I wrapped my arms around his shoulders. "As long as I am alive, I will be glad to rescue you."

The smile slowly returned to his face after that.

"So, do many of your people get taken my that Jack-monster?"

"No, since then we don't go there except for when the water gets very, very low and we have no choice but to get water from there."

"Surely that would be even more dangerous. Back on Earth we have these fish that are fine to swim with when there is plenty of water, but when the water runs low, they turn ravenous and carnivorous. They can rip the flesh from a person in minutes!"

"Wow..." Harry breathed with awe or alarm. "Earth sounds scary."

I shrugged. "It can be. It just depends on where you go and how prepared you are. One day I'll take you home to my own country. You can meet my parents and see all the sights. Some of the most poisonous creatures on Earth live on my country, but they mainly eat each other, and don't bother you if you don't bother them." I paused, alarmed with what I had just offered him. "That is, if you would like to."

Harry pulled my head down to knock foreheads with me. "I think I would like that. Very much."

The birds, etc.. over head were just starting their screeching when we made it to the village. The fires of the mud brick houses were stoked nice and high, plenty of firewood near by each house. There were curtains of some kind hanging in some of the doorways, and the yellow wearers were looking at me with suspicion as Harry lead me past them towards the huge trees the upper village was in. As before the other colour wearers up there stopped all they were doing to watch as Harry and I climbed up what was like a stairway out of branches. Spiraling round and round the great tree until we came to the level of the village. There were hundreds of Iniri, frozen to their spots, watching me as Harry lead me past them. We crossed a rope bridge from one huge tree to another quite a number of times, climbing up more spiral branch stairways, and even walking through huge holes through the trees that were like tunnels until we came to a walkway made of

branches tied together like a raft that surrounded the hugest tree I had ever seen. Its trunk was the size of a city block and its branches reached out in all directions. The raft walkway circled around it as far as the eye could see. Iniri were still watching us wide eyed, then I heard a thundering sound that I identified as feet running towards us. Ahead a voice called out and Harry cried out for joy and rushed forward to embrace the Iniri that had come running. Harry pulled this new person back towards me, while they chattered excitedly together in their language. Beside me an Iniri was staring up at me with awe plainly written on his face. I smiled down at the little thing (child? Only came up to my waist), and he blinked before hurrying away. The frozen Iniri also continued on with their own business as Harry arrived back at my side, grinning from ear to ear, dragging the Iniri by the hand. This new Iniri was taller than Harry (as most of them tend to be), dressed in blue, hair braided down the back of his head just like Harry's had been. His eyes were violet with gold specks, and kept turning from Harry to me. There was a smile on his face he looked me over head to toe, then leaned down to say something in Harry's ear. Harry choked, then giggled, looking embarrassed.

"What did he say?" I asked.

"Later." When Harry had regained control of himself he introduced us. "This is my Bearer," He then said a name that was a mixture of whistles and clicks. I blinked.

"I don't think I can say that." I said earnestly. He spoke with his bearer, (which I found out was pretty much the same as mother, only the roles can change from child to child. Kind of confusing.) and Bearer said something that sounded like "Prrree"

"Can you say Prrree?" Harry asked, eyes all wide and almost teasing. I practiced a few times just to make sure I could get the rolling "r" sound off of my tongue, and Prrree was very happy, giving me a welcoming hug. Then Prrree was ushering us along the walkway into one of the many hollowed areas that resembled archways. Through the arch was a large open space that Harry explained was naturally occurring in this tree type. There were ten more Iniri in this space, all similar in appearance to Harry and Prrree. The tallest of them all stood before them, barring our passage. He was almost as tall as I was, and had green eyes with orange specks that glittered imposingly with the light of the afternoon sun. Harry introduced him as his Planter (father), again with a name I couldn't possibly pronounce. Harry took pity on me and told me I could call this guy Claud. Claud was very stern and more muscular than any other Iniri I had seen before. He had a look about him that said Alpha Wolf, and looked almost ready to attack my throat until Harry stepped up to him and gave him a big hug. Claud returned the hug warmly, sniffing Harry's face for a few moments. There came a low rumble from Claud's throat before he released Harry. Then Harry came back and tugged me into the big sphere-like room. There were gray curtains lining the walls and hanging around from a few branches that grew out horizontal to the ground. The floor of the ball was covered with a fine moss that looked very soft to walk on. The nine other Iniri were seated by the back of the ball and looked really comfortable, lounging there together with wooden bowls. Around them from other branches hung dried and drying herbs of various kinds. They were all looking at me with curiosity. Harry pulled me amongst them and started chattering away. All at once they climbed to their feet and started surrounding me, reaching out to touch my hair, face, clothes... I laughed nervously and pushed some hands away when they became a little too intimate in their touching. But I need not have, Harry snarled like a tiger at the one who did that and they backed away like a beaten dog. None of the others dared get too touch-happy after that.

Soon Harry tugged me down to sit on the moss amongst the other nine, who were some of his siblings, and he planted himself virtually in my lap. I wrapped my arms around his middle and he purred leaning back against me. Prrree called out something and three of the nine stood to help him bring food in bowls over to the circle where we were all seated. Claud sat opposite us, watching me with eagle eyes.

"I'm not sure your dad likes me." I whispered while bowls were placed on the ground in front of

us.

"Don't be silly," Harry patted my hand. "He only wants to make sure I am happy with you."

"Oh."

Harry's family passed around a large bowl filled with some kind of red liquid that each member drank out of then passed it along. I asked Harry to explain everything as it was happening. He said that they drink from the same cup in thanksgiving for the food provided. Naturally I took a sip when it was passed to us. I didn't want to offend. It was like drinking very thick and bitter plumb juice. Kind of nice once you got used to it.

The bowls were filled with nuts, berries and flowers of all sorts of shapes and colours. Harry made the selection for me and hand fed me the entire time. I returned the favor, especially enjoying feeding him a bright red berry about the size and appearance of a strawberry. Harry bit into it, spilling red juices all over his lips before licking it away. It sent lust shooting through my stomach, and I could tell by his hooded eyes and smile he picked up on it. With the next bite he took, I swept down and captured his sweet lips with mine. Harry wrapped his arms around my neck and we moved together, me crawling over him to press our bodies in the right places. I don't know if it was Harry or I that knocked a bowl of nuts over, I just heard them scatter across the ground, along with snickers and whistles from our audience. I realised I may have done something tabooed then, and pulled back. Harry was panting, clinging to me. Claud did not look impressed. I looked Harry in the eyes and slowly nudged his forehead with mine. There were loud gasps all around, and I wanted to look at Claud to see if he was unhappy about what I had done, but Harry grabbed me by the hair and returned the nudging hard. By The end of it we were both grinning at each other, and so was Prrree. He said something in a tone that was both teasing and lecherous.

"He said that we can use my room." Harry translated, looking embarrassed and yet enjoying the whole thing. I looked between Prrree and Claud to make sure. Claud was smiling.

"Maybe later."

Harry translated, and Claud let out a huge belly laugh, followed by the rest of the family.

"Planter likes you." Harry purred. I nudged his forehead with mine again, pleased.

Later Prrree sat near me along with the three (I think) who helped serve the food earlier, humming a tune as they ground dried leaves in primitive looking mortar and pestals. I watched, actually fascinated at how he would measure out and crush leaves, flowers, berries, seeds... All together, then brush them into a spare bowl. He spoke, using hand gestures to demonstrate to the 'children', and then to me said something which I think meant that the mixture was for making a drink. I would have to check with Harry, and have him teach me some simple words like "Yes", "No" and "I don't understand". Harry was seated with his other siblings, Claude had gone somewhere else. The other siblings all had their eyes turned up to Harry with awe, asking him questions (if I guessed correctly).

I checked the time on my watch. 19:58 hours. The sun was getting lower, the out side sky was red through the trees. Then Harry was beside me, looking irritated but trying to hide it. He tugged my arm. "Come on." He said quietly, and I stood to follow him behind one of the curtains to the folded set of fabric (sheets?) that sat on the mossy floor. He set about un-folding the top most one, shaking it to spread it out.

"What's the matter?" I whispered, joining him in the opening of the silk like stuff on the side opposite him. He lowered his end to the ground and I followed suit. Harry sat down in a huff, I followed, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. He looked almost murderous. I was intrigued.

"All right, who said what?"

He glared at me for a moment me for sighing and leaning in to press his head under my chin. "Enri wanted to know what you were like under your clothes."

I raised my eye brows. "Yeeeeeeah? What did you say?"

"The truth. That you were enormous and that your kind was different to ours inside."

"Enormous, eh. Heh. So what's the problem?"

"They said that there must be something wrong since you haven't planted a seed in me yet. They said that maybe I still was tainted."

"Did you tell them to get stuffed?"

"No. I came to get you." Harry then pushed me down and straddled me. I placed my hands on his hips to steady him, easily aroused by the position. He started to undo the buttons on my shirt. I stilled his hands with my own.

"Wait, are you wanting to, you know, go the whole way. Now? As in make a baby?"

"Yes." He hissed.

"Are you sure?"

His shoulders slumped, and his head dropped. "Not really." Was quietly said. "But if I don't then there could be trouble."

I took in a deep breath, not really liking this. "Alright. What do I have to do?"

We were very quickly naked, me still on my back and Harry straddling me. His hair was loose, so I brushed my fingers through it before rubbing his quivering belly. He purred out a moan, and then we kissed deeply. I wanted to relax him and also to forget that I wasn't really happy about this. Baby making was a whole new level of being that I wasn't sure I was prepared for. Pretend everything is fine, I told myself. Deal with it later.

I have discovered that having Harry rubbing his warm, soft skin along mine is an easy cure for erection problems, and the way he wiggled when I ran my fingers down his sides was truly wonderful. We didn't talk at all as Harry grabbed my penis to hold it still while he lowered himself upon me. I gripped his upper arm and kept eye contact with him the entire time. He was so tight and hot, and then a change of angle that made me buck in pain/pleasure because there is no way dicks are supposed to bend like that, and then there was moistness and another vice-like tightness that I had never felt before. Harry's entire body jerked, head thrown back, and he let out a small cry that was not one of pleasure. I squeezed his arm stilling his movements. He shook like he was freezing, and I had to coax him to look me in the eyes again. He was flinching. As we stilled our progress, he slowly hunched over, whimpering.

"Stop." I told him. He shook his head no. "What's wrong then?"

"You're... very big..." He rasped, a wince in his eyes. "Hurts... a bit."

"A bit? That looks like a lot to me. Complement or no, I am not going to hurt you by doing this here and now. I don't know about with your people, but where I come from making babies is not supposed to hurt."

I think I said that a bit harshly because Harry looked like he was going to cry. "I'm sorry," His voice hitched and he pulled off of me, making my back arch and toes curl as I was straightened again. He dropped beside me and curled up with his back to me, shaking and sobbing quietly. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," He kept saying. I snagged the sheet and spooned around him, wrapping it around us as I did so.

"Hey," I cooed. "Why are you sorry?"

He turned his head to look up at me, tears were streaming from his eyes. "Because I can't do my duty. I'm sorry. You are my mate and I just can't. I don't know why it wont work, it shouldn't hurt at all. It's supposed to feel wonderful. There must be something wrong with me."

"OR," I interjected. "now is simply not the right time." He blinked at me, looking puzzled. "Let's wait until we can really be alone, and not have to worry about social obligations or what not. What do you say?" I didn't say that we simply might not be physically compatible. I figured that warrented further exploration in private. But for Harry that was enough. We lay there sharing each other's body warmth, the sheet very insulating against any cold that might have come in as the sun vanished. Around me was silence. Harry and his family had also switched off. I sighed, still being very aroused, and thinking that even though he might think it was what I wanted him for, that Harry would not appreciate being shagged up the backside without knowing about it. Thinking of which made me pull away from him and turn on the light on my watch to check myself. There was no blood on me, so I moved to check out between Harry's legs. All looked fine as far as I could tell. I just hoped that he wasn't actually injured in any way. I then rolled away from him and reintroduced Mister Happy to Mrs Palmer and her five daughters.

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Chapter 10 - The Missing Child by Zuzanny
26 june 2005- 09 july 2005

Thank you to everyone who has been reading this and has contacted me about it. Your comments/critisisms are greatly appreciated!

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny (lionette AT mailcity dot com minus the spaces and with the symbols)

part 10

I was startled out of my drifting almost-asleep-ness by my watch buzzing. In the dark the bright green numbers 01:26 flashed, making my eyes hurt. Taking a few deep breaths to settle my racing heart I pressed the button on the watch to receive the call.

"Yes?" I hissed, rolling onto my back to bring the watch close to my mouth, my other hand lying over my eyes.

"Dammit! Where the hell are you?!" It was Rodgers on the other end. The panic in his voice made me instantly awake.

"At Harry's village. What's happened?"

"That damned 'electrical disturbance' shit happened again."

"At night? That hasn't happened before."

"Yeah, well. It knocked the whole station out this time. I only just got it fixed a few minutes ago. Of course I would have had it done sooner if a certain someone would not have vanished from the

face of the planet right when they were needed."

"Yeah, well, Harry wanted to go visit his parents, and I'm off duty."

"I wasn't talking about you." I sat up, suddenly concerned. "Elfondso isn't with you by any chance?"

"No. I haven't seen him since shift end."

"Shit!" Rodgers took in a deep breath. "We've got a team out looking for him, but in this place he could be anywhere!"

The Plant came to mind. But it had not reacted to us at all. "I'd ask around here, but all the Iniri are dead to the world." A crunching noise from outside the front entrance way grabbed my attention. "Hang on." I untangled myself from Harry's warm arms and the blanket wrapped around us and cautiously headed out to the entrance way. The drop in temperature out of the bedding was a shock. My naked skin was instantly covered in goose-bumps and I struggled not to shiver. The only way I found the entrance in the dark was because of the full moon's light shimmering through the tree tops outside. The crunching continued, sounding like nuts were cracking or being crushed over and over again. Looking out the doorway I saw nothing, but the noise continued from above my head. I stuck my head out and looked up almost jumping out of my skin to find a lizard the size of me clinging to the trunk over the doorway. The light of the moon reflected in the multi-coloured shell of the big bug it was chewing. And the sharp pointed teeth. It turned its head to look at me with reflective lizard eyes, considering if I was edible or not, and its clear eye lids blinked. Then slowly, dismissing me completely, it moved off into the night like the trunk was the ground.

"Flippen banana smoothies!" I breathed to myself, then padded back into the house-hole, back to where I hoped Harry was still sleeping. "You there still?" I asked of Rodgers.

"Yeah. What happened?"

"Just saw this big mother lizard eating one Georges' bugs."

Rodgers chuckled at that. Then we both sobered. "Was it big enough to eat a man?"

"I don't know. But Harry told me about a creature that would. Though I'm pretty sure that it would stay in its territory over the other side of the mountains." I hoped.

"I hope. In the meantime, where could Elfondso be? The computer can't find him."

"I dunno. Unfortunately this place is a rabbit warren and I don't even have a torch with me, just my watch-light. I'll have to wait till morning."

"Probably safer with man-eating plants and lizards and God only knows what else roaming around."

It took a while for me to go to sleep again after that. I kept thinking about that lizard and wondering what was stopping it from trying out a little bigger flesh. But I know I did sleep because the next thing I knew Harry was in my arms, nuzzling my neck in a very pleasurable way. While I didn't open my eyes I smiled and laughed a little at his way of waking me up. His tongue against my neck was warm and slightly rough. Not quite like a cat's but enough to make my hair stand on end and send little sparks of arousal through my body. I wrapped my arms around him, moaning softly when he straddled me, and pulled him close for a kiss. His hair was loose and fell all around us, and his mouth tasted like almonds. I felt his arousal and rocked my hips up to grind together.

"Uhnng..." Harry breathed against my lips and joined in. We continued, clinging to each other, picking up the pace when when we were both close to completion. The noises Harry made driving me closer and closer to the edge.

So when Preee decided to yank the curtain back to wish us good morning (I think) I wanted to shoot him. I froze, seeing his shock then amusement. Then Harry freaked me further by continuing to grind regardless of the audience and breathlessly begging me not to stop either.

"But your mum!" I hissed.

Harry tossed his head back, sitting himself up and gripping my arms so tight his nails drew my blood. "I don't CARE!" He ground out, rubbing frantically. Thankfully Preee decided to pull the curtain closed again.

"God," I breathed, adrenalin pumping through my blood. I flung my arms around Harry's back, yanked him close to ravage his mouth, then rolled us so that I was on top of him, and used his groin as my own personal pleasure post. Harry's head was thrown back against the ground, his mouth wide open as we panted and rocked frantically, these little pleasure filled "Ahh! Ahh! Ahh!" noises streaming from his mouth. He dug his fingers into my back, and squeezed me tight with his thighs as I felt his pulse against me. Then I was hit with the white light of my orgasm, and collapsed upon him.

We lay like that for a few moments, both of us panting to catch our breath. Then Harry grinned up at me, running his fingers through my hair and down the back of my head to stoke my neck. "Mmm..." He purred in that sexy contented way of his. "MY human..."

I pressed my forehead to his, smearing him with my sweat. "MY Iniri." His reaction was to twitch and moan with renewed arousal. I felt his body respond against my stomach and saw his eyes dilate even further. He grabbed hold of my hair and yanked me down to slip his tongue in my mouth forcefully. I met his action with equal force, biting and nipping his tongue, lips and then down his neck. "My Iniri." I growled against his throat, and then to my surprise felt Harry arch up under me, gasping and coming once again against my stomach. He flopped back against the moss, panting and dazed.

I settled beside him, holding my head up with my hand. "Good morning." I said, stroking some strands of hair from his face.

He smiled up at me, the stars clearing from his eyes, and began chuckling. "A VERY Good morning." Then the smile was wiped from his face, ears twitching about. He sat up. And distractedly wiped himself clean with the blanket/cloth. He was looking in the direction of the doorway, ears twitching like a tiger listening for an enemy in the grass.

"What is it?" I asked, also wiping myself clean.

Harry was frowning. "It sounds like..." He said slowly, tilting his head to one side. "One of my people, a child, is missing." Said like that was the most strange thing possible.

That brought Elfondso back to mind. "One of my people is too." I said quietly. Harry jerked away from me with horror. So I told him about how Rodgers had called looking for me during the night, and how the electrical disturbance knocked all the computers out of wack. That calmed Harry down, he had thought I had suddenly sprouted psychic tendencies.

We both dressed as quickly as we could, and soon we were out facing Harry's parents, siblings, and out side on the walkways, quite a number of Iniri that I didn't know. They were all talking in hushed voices, looking about with worried expressions, ears twitching with agitation. Some of the

ones outside were not pleased to see me, but Harry was there, chattering away in Iniri, I hope explaining that I was a friend and not a threat. Then Harry tugged on my arm to draw me away from the crowds back to our private little corner.

"Do you know what's going on?" I asked him.

"Last night, Asari was with his family when night came, but then in the morning he was gone. There was no sign of him. They think that he was taken by you humans."

"I doubt that Elfondso could find his way here all by himself, let alone kidnap someone and escape without notice."

Harry gave me a small smile. "You're right." He said. "If a human had been there, then he would have left footprints, or at least a scent behind. But there is nothing."

"What about... giant lizards. Last night I saw one outside your family's doorway. I thought it was eating a bug. Could I have been wrong?"

Harry frowned when I told him about it. I ended up leading him out through the crowd to show him where the lizard had been. The crowd parted for me like I was something vial. Harry peered at the tree bark for a while before asking me to boost him up. He was about as heavy as a teenager, making me grunt a little as he climbed up on my shoulders and stood with perfect balance. After peering closer to the actual spot, he let me put him down. He spoke to the crowd, pointing out a swerving trail above the doorway and along the tree that all the Iniri followed with their heads. Looking grim, the outside group separated and began following the trail. Harry explained to me that they would track this creature down, and discover if it had taken the child.

I didn't ask if they were going to kill it.

I called in to see if Elfondso had turned up yet and to tell them what was going on. No one had found him, and I was wanted back ASAP. When I looked up to find Harry and tell him I had to leave, I saw him with Preee, Preee had his hand on Harry's shoulder talking softly like a parent does when they are telling their kid something bad is going to turn out ok. They then both looked over at me, and smiled. Preee approached, patted my shoulder affectionately (while I couldn't help blushing), before exiting the dwelling.

"He's going to gather some others to help look for your man as well." Harry explained from my side. I nodded, wrapped an arm around his shoulder, and let him lead me through the warren of trees back down the mountain side.

(insertlinebreakhere)

There was an Iniri waiting at the tree line by the space shuttle when we came down the track. He was leaning against a tree casually, his long white hair reaching past his thighs and that was with it tied up in a pony tail. He was dressed in blue and was sniffing a white lillium-like flower that he was holding. It had a very long stem, almost as long as his arm. He had been looking at the station, but his ears perked up at our approach, and he turned his head to look at us. He smiled lazily when he saw us together, his eyes shifting over us. He pushed himself away from the tree with a foot and came towards us. I noticed he was taller than Harry (as usual) but only slightly shorter than I was. He walked with something like a sway that was either a sign of grace or sexual confidence. I wasn't sure what to make of it. He stopped about a meter from us and fixed his eyes on Harry. They spoke for a few moments before the Iniri handed Harry the flower and swaggered past us into the trees. I watched him go, losing him within a few moments.

"Well, that was odd." Harry said, looking at the flower.

"He wasn't challenging me for you, was he?" I wasn't sure what their 'throwing down the glove'

traditions were.

"No," Harry looked up at me, head tilted to the side, smiling slightly. "Firstly he congratulated me on my bonding." I raised my eye brows, expecting more than that. We continued walking. "Then he asked that I deliver this to Ford. I asked if he would like to come aboard, but he didn't want to."

I shrugged. "Not everyone wants to, and that's ok you know."

(insertlinebreakhere)

Elfondso was still missing by the time we reached our quarters. Rodgers was basically leaning down my throat every five minutes to get into the control room and help with the search, so I decided to leave Harry in our quarters to clean himself up and get something to eat, and left to deliver the flower to Ford. Who was NOW back on board.

(insertlinebreakhere)

Ford looked up from his translating work as I knocked on the open doorway of the study room. (It's like a miniature library with computer consoles and net access.) He was the only one here, which was normal for this time of day. For an instant I was sure his eyes were wide with terror, but then he recognised me and the fear left, leaving the customary wariness we all know and love. He didn't quite smile at me, but it wasn't a glare either, and by the inclinations of his head I took it that I could enter.

I smiled as I lent against the desk he was using, holding the lillium-look-alike out to him. "How's it going?" I asked.

Ford looked like he was going to answer until he noticed the flower. Then his eyes widened with alarm and he jumped to his feet, knocking his chair over as he did so. "Where did you get that?!" He demanded, never taking his eyes off it, like it was something deadly. I frowned. Knowing the plants around here, it could be. But surely Harry would have told me if it were.

"Harry asked me to pass this on." I replied. Ford's shoulder's relaxed slightly, he let out a breath, until I continued. "We saw an Iniri on the way back here from the village, and he wanted you to have it."

Ford clutched at his chest in a similar way that a human having a heart attack would, and he doubled over like he was in pain. Only his hand out waving me away stopped me from calling the in medics in a hazmat suit. He started babbling in Iniri. I backed away a few steps. I was getting a sinking feeling about the plant life.

"What's the matter?" I asked slowly.


Ford suddenly straightened, taking a determined breath. "Did Harry get this... person's name?"

I shrugged. "I doubt it. Why?"

Ford came to me, took the flower, and held it to his nose. He inhaled deeply, closing his eyes as he did so. Slowly he lowered himself into another upright chair, before fixing his eyes upon mine. He started brushing the petals against his cheek.

"Yesterday," He said calmly. "I visited the grave of my mate."

"Oh?" Finally! Info!

"When I go there, I gather these flowers as I walk." He looked down at the flower, using his fingertips at the tip of the stem to make it twirl. "These were ...Aaron's... favorite." His mouth twitched in a slight smile, then he did smile  bitterly- at me. "You and Aaron were very

similar actually. Both kind, strong, protective if a tad misguided." He took in a deep breath and lowered his head. "Both claimed tainted as mates."

I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing and just listened. It was a shock to think that Ford had gone through what Harry had. I wondered how Ford would have gotten the plant out? It made sense to me now that Ford would be the one to advise me about dealing with Harry.

Ford continued, eyes unfocused and smiling at his memories. "We were very happy. I had never thought I could be happy again after-" He cut off, turning his head away, frowning again.

"What happened?"

"He was murdered." Ford growled angrily. "By the same one that caused my disgrace!" His eyes flashed, and he was back on his feet, pacing the small floor space with agitation. "And if THAT was not enough, he now desecrates Aaron's grave! His GRAVE! Why? You MALLICIOUS-" He yelled to the roof, once again speaking his native tongue. When he was done ranting, he sank to the floor like a deflated balloon. There were tears in his eyes when he looked back at the flower. I moved closer, crouching beside him but not touching.

"After Aaron... died," He continued, his voice tired. "I traveled from town to town trying to get away. But He always found me. Then about fifty years ago I ended up back here and HE didn't. I thought maybe I was safe, that I could start to live again. I should have known that I never could."

After he trailed off there was silence between us for a few moments. I was uncomfortable with all this. Ford just kept looking down at the flower, tears dripping from his face.

"Um, just so you know, this isn't my specialty." I had my suspicions of what Ford wasn't telling me, but I wanted to be sure. "What exactly did this... person... do to you?"

Ford shuddered and quietly said "He planted his child within me, and forced me to bond with him." He turned desperate eyes to me. "But I didn't want to! I had no idea! How could I know? I was gray and it's only on becoming violet do we even really learn about these things."

"How could he force you to bond?" I was remembering the little ceremony Harry and I went through.

Ford rubbed his eyes. "Dante' was alive before the cataclysm." Cataclysm? Why is there always one of them? "We used to have technology like yours." That was a major shock. "Dante' said it was deep under the mountains, that the entrance was through the valleys. You know how curious we are by nature. I remember stepping onto the valley floor then waking up underground wearing red and bonded to him. I had thought he was my friend. I had no idea there was anything as painful as... what he did to me."

Anything I might have said was cut off by my watch going off. I sighed and apologized to Ford before answering.

"WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?!" It was Rodgers again, ranting about how late I was. By the time I had finished dealing with him, Ford had straightened himself up again, all signs of his distress were firmly back behind his cool mask. And knew that I had lost any chance of getting him to open up to me further. Before I could say anything he swept out of the room, head held high.

I felt like shit.

(Insertlinebreakhere)

"You were meant to be here half an hour ago! What is it with you? Ever since you started

shagging that... that... creature... your brain has switched off!" Rodgers was trying to stare me down as he ranted. "It's obvious to everyone on board where your mind is..."

I rolled my eyes at him. "Actually," I contradicted him calmly. "I was talking with Ford."

Of course he took that the wrong way. "Great, so one isn't enough, now you have to shag both of the ambassadors. And here I had always thought you were a strictly straight guy. I should have known that you liked animals so much."

I grabbed him and slammed him against the wall. "I'll not have you say such crap about the Iniri. They share 99 percent the same genes as us. They are people, not animals. Get over yourself Rodgers before I really kick your ass."

Rodgers looked highly indignant, but I dropped him and stalked over to a computer console to check out scans of the mountains. I wondered if anything that Ford had said about technology under the mountains was true. Rodgers left, and right then I didn't care if I ever saw him again.

"What are you looking at?" Georges asked quietly from over my shoulder. I told him about the possibility of caves or such under the mountains, and he peered closer at the screens. "Rodgers is really worried about Elfondso, you know." He whispered to me.

"I know." It's expected between those two.

"He's really counting on you to help find him."

"I know. That's why I'm checking this out. Elfondso was with us when we checked out the valley. If he had noticed something, he might have gone to look. He's probably fine."

"Are there really man-eating lizards out there?"

I shrugged. "You'll have to talk to Harry about that." Georges looked horrified. I was Un Impressed. "What's the problem now? You have a thing against Harry too?"

Georges blushed and averted his eyes. "No." He whispered. "It's... I don't think... I... um..."

"Yeeees?"

"I can't think of him as a guy." Georges blushed a darker shade of red then.

"Ah, I see." I could understand that perfectly. But my thoughts were back to Ford. "Could you do me a favor and watch after Ford? He's... upset about something."

Georges nodded, I'm sure glad to be off the topic, and away he went. I was glad to go back to my searching. I clicked through images of the mountains and the valleys and information about their mineral contents (etc...), seeming to take for ever, until I found something that just could be what Ford was talking about. I leaned closer to the screen trying to figure out if the little shadow under an overhang hidden by a crowd of The Plants could actually be a cave.

Rodgers plonked himself down in a seat beside me. "I'm sorry." He said quietly. "I was out of line saying those things about Harry and Ford."

"Yes you were." I looked at him, his entire being was slumped which was not normal for Rodgers. "And you better not even think such disgusting things about them again. I don't care what you think of me, I can always kick your butt out through your teeth, but Harry and Ford, they're innocent. And they're NOT animals."

"I know." Then he set his eyes on my screen. "What have you found?"

"A long shot. Has anyone searched here?"

Rodgers shook his head no.

(insertlinebreakhere)

We gathered the search team c together (It was time of the others to sleep.) in the briefing room and told them about the possibility of a cave. We made sure everyone had their buddies and that their equipment worked properly, then we took the minibus out to the valley again. Georges stayed behind to work communications with Rodgers.

As we flew towards the suspected cave, I found myself wondering why Elfondso would go there all by himself even if he did suspect it to be an interesting find. To just vanish himself was out of character. I hoped that we found him safe and sound, and that there were no nasty surprises waiting for us when we got there.

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Chapter 11 - Elfondso by Zuzanny

20 September 2005 - 21 October 2005

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

lionette AT mailcity DOT com

Part 11

We piled out of the Mini-bus and approached the hidden cave area with caution, weapons ready, each of us looking out for any sign of trouble or Elfondso. The Plants ignored us as usual which pleased me. Searching the ground found the grasses at the rocky base of the mountain were pressed down in a used pathway. Someone pointed out that an animal could be living in the cave and that's what made the path... And thinking about what Ford had told me of the cave I could agree with that. Peterson started yelling out Elfondso's name as he walked towards the cave entrance, but then Simmons called out from the northern edge of the mountain base. He had found Elfondso's com unit smashed amongst the rocks, along with signs of a minor landslide from above. We all stepped back away from the mountain and looked up. Rocks and greenery with flowers and trees mixed in. A typical mountain side that had not been defiled by mankind. And then, about twenty-five meters up something white fluttered in the wind.

"Elfondso liked to go rock climbing back Earthside." Peterson ventured to the group. We piled back into the Mini Bus and Peterson piloted us up the side of the mountain.

On a ledge there lay Elfondso, arms spread out from his sides with an Iniri curled up over his chest. The Iniri's hair was hanging over the ledge and flapping in the wild wind the Mini Bus whipped up. His head was resting on Elfondso's chest, eyes turned towards Elfondso's face. If not for the fact that both of them were fully clothed and that there were what looked like grassy bandages on Elfondso's head, neck, and limbs, they could easily have been mistaken for a couple just finished a sexual romp.

The Iniri sat up and watched vaguely as the Mini Bus leveled out and we prepared to dismount. He kept one hand pressed over Elfondso's heart as he watched us. We piled out with the medical gear and were crouched beside our shipmate before I suddenly remembered the scent from The Plant. I opened my mouth to order every one back, but then noticed that the Iniri was not reacting at all like Harry had. His cheeks did not go red and his eyes didn't shift from watching us vaguely, like he was half asleep.

I watched Peterson check Elfondso over, peeling back the patch of green on Elfondso's head. Peterson swore as white bone was revealed underneath, and I felt... ill. And worried about the greenery wrapped around Elfondso's neck. The patch on his head had been crusty with much dry blood, and he still lay in a small pool of it.

After a few moments Peterson declared Elfondso alive, unconscious and breathing. All the team breathed sighs of relief. I turned to the Iniri wishing Harry were able to be with me, or even Ford. But I asked as best I could what happened. The Iniri blinked at me, then gestured to the cliff face above us, tittering away merrily. I thought I understood a few words like "I" and "no", but with out Harry I couldn't be sure. Peterson became very busy organizing shifting Elfondso into the Mini bus without further damaging his spinal cord.

The Iniri silently watched us load Elfondso onto the bus, trailing close behind. He stepped cautiously aboard, then hurried to Elfondso's side where his stretcher was secured against the wall. Then he climbed up and curled around Elfondso just as we had found them. Peterson tried to pull the Iniri off, but the Iniri shoved any hands away from him, snarling and baring teeth like a wild tiger. Some of the others instantly had their hands on their weapons, but the Iniri had settled his head back on Elfondso's chest.

I had a suspicion that Elfondso had been up to recreational activities other than rock climbing... But then again, the Iniri was dressed in gray and had his hair loose, so maybe not.

I radioed ahead to Iris and to get Ford or Harry ready to interpret.

I watched Harry talk with the other Iniri through the superplex, both sitting close around the rounded table and blah-ing in comprehensively. We would have used Ford, but, well. Heh. He wasn't there. Again. Georges said he had followed Ford along the corridor leading to the open air lock, Ford left the ship and then when Georges' eyes had adjusted to the outside light Ford was gone. I just sighed and shrugged.

Georges was beside me, also watching the two Iniri intently. Apparently Harry had gone into the control room looking for me, and had stayed there. Harry and Georges had now become good friends. I wasn't bothered, I thought it would be good for Georges to have someone relatively the same age/maturity as him around. But the way Georges was smiling with delight every few minutes and get excited enough to wave around like a valley girl on speed, before pressing his face to the superplex some more was beginning to... disturb me.

"Alright junior," I asked saddling a chair beside him. Neither of us took our eyes off the Iniri in the interview room. "What's got you so happy?"

He grinned like a fool. "... I think I'm... getting it, sir." He said.

I blinked. I raised and eye brow or two.

Georges elaborated. "I've been listening and I think I am starting to understand their language!" He was bouncing on the toes of his feet like a school girl now.

I was shocked/surprised/impressed all at once. "Really." stated like I didn't care. "How well?"

"I don't know yet. I'll have to confirm with Harry. I don't want to tell you something that was wrong. Before, when Harry was helping me, he asked me to guess what he said, and," Georges blushed several shades of red. "I got it VERY wrong."

I chuckled. Then I though that getting Harry or Ford to teach us their language would be very helpful, especially in these sorts of situations.

Harry flung the door open, beaming brightly. "Your friend will be okay!" He announced. "Asari saw him fall and was able to get to him in time. I don't know how quickly humans regenerate, but the herbs Asari used are excellent for healing broken bones and body parts. He really is a very talented healer. Your friend is very lucky. Asari was wondering if he could go see his human yet?"

I blinked. Harry was looking so expectantly up at me. I was still confused. "No. No, hang on." I grabbed his elbow and drew him back into the interview room with me. Asari was staring off at the wall, murmuring softly to himself while he sat at the table.

Now Harry was confused. "What's wrong? Why can't he-"

I put a finger to his lips to silence him, which made Harry gasp and his pupils dilate nicely. "I need to know exactly what happened to Elfondso, how he got hurt. Will you translate for me. Please?" I almost batted my eye lashes at him, but he smiled warmly before I had to do that.

"Of course I will." Harry pulled my head down and rubbed his forehead against mine. I returned the nudging, enjoying the purring noises he made. "I hunger for you." He whispered hotly. I chuckled and nipped the tip of his ear.

"Later," I returned with my own purr, then extracted myself from him and sat on the chair opposite Asari. "Do I understand correctly that this is the missing kid from your village?"

Harry slid beside Asari, who was still eyes elsewhere. "Yes," Harry replied for him. "He saw Elfondso fall and went to help him."

"Alright, so when did Elfondso fall? Day or night?"

Harry spoke briefly, and Asari replied softly, almost dreamily, his head tilted to the side slightly and hands tracing invisible patterns in the air in front of him. Harry said "He says, 'I had been watching the human climbing the mountain side just before sleep time. He had been climbing every day for the last few days, always going higher the next time.'" Harry paused, waiting for Asari to continue. "Then, this time, he climbed on some unstable rock and fell. I knew he was badly hurt, and gathered what I needed to help him." It ended.

"Why didn't you get anyone else to help?" I directed to Asari. Asari tilted his head further to the side while Harry asked.

Harry translated "Everyone was sleeping." Simple, like that would have been obvious.

"Did you try waking them up?" Harry gave me a confused look before asking my question.

Asari smiled slightly. "Have YOU ever tried waking them up?" Harry turned to me looking confused. "What does he mean?" He asked me. "I don't understand."

I sat thinking for a few moments. Then I realised exactly why Asari's eyes had been bothering me. They had no pupils. His eyes were violet with gold specks, but no pupils. "Have you ever seen the night?" I asked Harry. He blinked.

"Kay-night or En-night?"

"En-night."

"'Night: the period of darkness between one day and the next; the time from sunset to sunrise'?" He quoted from our on line dictionary. I nodded, confirming his meanings. He shook his head no.

"What is it like?" Eyes wide and head tilted back with his curiosity face now.

Asari said something shortly. I asked what it was. Harry said "He said it is very quiet." Then he frowned, thinking it over.

"He's right." I concurred. "It is very quiet. Here."

"I don't understand why Asari would know about Night when no one else does. Apart from you, I mean."

Asari stood from his seat and started to wander around the room, trailing his fingertips against the walls as he went. I watched him wander, not moving to stop or assist him. His other hand was held out from his body in front of him. But it seemed more of a balance thing, because he avoided the chairs that were pulled out against the wall, and even the low coffee table on the other side of the center table.

"I think," I said slowly. "It's because he can't see."

"What?" Harry looked between Asari and I incredulously. "But... But... How?"

I shrugged. "Ask him why he didn't wake me up."

Harry blinked, but just as he was opening his mouth, Asari spoke. "He said he didn't have time, that the humans injuries were too severe to wait."

"...Can he understand me?" Asari answered yes in Iniri, which Harry translated but I already knew. But then he continued blabbing words I didn't understand.

Harry smiled again at the end of it and explained that Asari had to listen for a while first but now could understand me. As I have previously stated, the Iniri are fast learners. When I first met Harry we spoke at each other for a few hours before he suddenly understood me. Like a switch had clicked in his brain. I found it ironic that when we first met it was also due to injury. Me slipping and dislocating my knee, and Harry finding me and fixing my knee. But that's a story for another time.

Asari kept his fingertips to the wall opposite me, stopped pacing, and leaned in to press his forehead against the wall. He spoke slowly, his voice low.

Harry pressed his hand over mine and squeezed briefly to get my attention. His expression was very serious. "You should let him go to Elfondso now."

I took in a deep breath and let it out in a grand sigh. "Alright. But I may want to ask him more questions later. Understand?" Both Harry and Asari nodded their heads. Asari a slow inclination of his head, and Harry an energetic, bubbly one that made me think of an Anime character going "Hai, Hai!"

I let them go. Georges and I followed behind as Harry lead Asari through the station to the med bay. Another irony. Harry had been there enough times to know his way there.

Elfondso was lying unconscious, monitoring equipment attached to his head and chest, breathing and other tubes were also present. His head was bandaged, right arm in a cast, and neck in a splint. Lower than that was under the blankets. Elfondso's face was bruised blue around his mouth and right eye. He looked like he had had the shit kicked out of him. Iris was in the cubicle with him, observing his life signs.

Harry tapped on the superplex to get Iris' attention and permission to enter. Then they rushed to

Elfondso's side. Iris didn't comment about Asari right away, but stood with Georges and I and watched as he ran his hands over Elfondso's face, shoulders, chest, all the way down to his toes, and then back to his chest again. Asari's fingers twitched when ever he touched a tube or sensor. Harry asked for him what they were, and Iris explained as simply as she could. Asari nodded his head once to say he understood, then climbed upon the bed to curl around Elfondso in the way he had been when we had first met him. Iris was about to stop him when Georges tugged on her arm.

"Asari knows what he's doing." Georges stated as a fact. "He's a great healer."

Iris raised her eyebrows at him, gently extracting her arm from his hand. "Alright. But the moment there is any indication of distress, I'm tossing him out on his arse." She turned and swept into her office. Georges smiled with satisfaction. I patted his shoulder and shooed him over to our Iniri folk before I followed Iris into her office. I closed the door and leaned back against it.

"So, how bad is he?" I asked after watching her click computer stuff for a few moments.

"Bad." She replied, leaning back into her arm chair with a sigh. "But not as bad as it could have been. He should be dead."

"Head or neck?"

"Neck. His spinal cord was completely severed."

"Oy." And I swore some more. I fell into a chair opposite her. I felt... horrible. I can't really describe exactly how I felt. I knew Elfondso; super active, very much into sports and out door recreational activities. Loves being the center of attention. Now he will be confined to a wheel chair and a breathing tube for the rest of his life. A life like that would be hell. I turned my head away bitterly. He would be better off dead.

"I know what you're thinking." Iris said from behind her folded together hands, elbows resting on the desk top. "And I thought so too... Until I ran some tests." There was a glint in her eyes that made me... nervous. "I will need to run further tests of course, to verify my findings, but... Even though his spine was completely severed at a critical point, he survived and can even breath on his own. I only have the breathing tubes there because I am cautious, but his breathing on his own should be impossible. Also, the scans have already shown signs of regrowth."

"Huh? Regrowth? In his spinal cord?" I ventured.

"Yes." Simply said, then she smiled with excitement. "I think those plants the Iniri wrapped around his neck have fantastic pharmaceutical properties that could revolutionise how we treat spinal injuries back Earthside! Imagine, no needing to go with stem cells and the controversy still surrounding that issue. We could just apply the appropriate flora and the nerve cells regrow and reattach all by themselves. This could be the very kind of thing Pharmcor have been looking for!"

I was stunned. "But..."

"Don't you see? Elfondso is going to walk again. He'll probably even feel healthier than he ever had before! Why is it the Iniri live so long and look so young? Because they live in a paradise of herbal remedies that actually work! That flower you brought in here? It doesn't just fix an upset stomach, it also eases stomach ulcers, kills off worm infections, gastric flues, and I bet it would even help with preventing appendicitis."

The excitement was rolling off her in waves, I could almost see it. "How do you know? Especially about the worms."

She gave me a secretive little smirk. "Doctor-patient privilege."

I slapped my hands down on the table and stood. "Alright then. I accept that the plants here are great. What I want to see is that the Iniri are not wiped out and their planet ravaged due to an over excited chemical company or six bent on increasing their profit margins even more to buy it's own little planet."

"A bit late for that." She quipped. "But I think Pharmcor would be more interested in trying to synthesis the specific effective compounds and patent that rather than buying this planet."

"Tselzry is not for sale." I growled with a protectiveness that surprised us both.

"I know," Iris replied quietly. "I know."

Harry was waiting outside Iris' door, looking very meek with his eyes lowered submissively. I reached out and took his hand, which made him smile and flick his eyes up before going down again. I drew him along as I walked away from the medbay.

"What is it?" I asked when we were out in the corridor.

"Martin was talking about playing a game in the mess hall tonight." Harry replied. "Cards, I think he called it."

For a second I had no idea who he was talking about, then I remembered that Martin was Georges' first name. I nodded my head, smiling as I recalled fondly various games Elfondso, Rodgers, Iris, Peterson and I played on our way here. Strip poker was fun until Iris revealed she was a card shark. I still think she cheated. No way all she could loose is a hair tie when all the rest of us lost everything but our underwear. The fact that Elfondso wore a thong still thoroughly disturbs me.

"Could we go watch please?" Harry's eyes were big and round, now all he needed was to flutter his eye lashes. I kissed the top of his head.

"Of course. Did he say when the game was?"

"Twenty-hundred hours." He quoted, eyes going cross-eyed as he remembered.

"You know, that's after dark."

Harry's shoulders slumped, his ears drooped, and he even pouted in his disappointment. "Oh." He said quietly.

I grinned wickedly. "I can think of a few things that could keep you awake."

He perked up, blinking hopefully at me. Then it clicked in his mind what I was referring to and he gave my arm a playful swat. "That wont work. You wear me out!"

I drew him close, facing me. "Oh, I don't know. There are ways to draw it out. Instead of Hard and Fast," His eyes dilated at those comments, I could feel his pulse quicken and his interest stirring against my thigh. "we can go Loong... and Slooow." I breathed the last into his mouth, and pushed him back against the wall, ravaging his mouth with my tongue. He made a pleased noise, wrapped his arms around my neck, fingers sliding through my hair making my skin tingle. He hooked a leg around my hip, bringing delightful contact. We were moaning, preparing to toss clothes right here in the hall...

"Get a room." Peterson quipped on his way past us to the medbay. Harry and I froze in our

position, panting heavily, watching Peterson calmly enter the medbay doors.

"Shall we?" I grinned down at my Iniri. He licked his lips slowly.

"Mmm-hmm. Besides, I know I like it Hard and Fast. Long and Slow may need some practice."

"Damn right!" And we ran giggling all the way back to our quarters.

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Chapter 12 - Strip Poker by Zuzanny

Thanks to Kat (Blackbird-green) for picking the colour of the fruit! :)

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer
by Zuzanny lionette AT mailcity DOT com

part 12

"The name of the game, me lads, is Strip Poker!" Iris the card shark announced with glee, shuffling the cards Vagas style. She was grinning from ear to ear, chewing a bread stick like a cigar, a shot of home-brewed plonk on the table in front of her. Knowing Iris, not only would she be wearing several hundred layers (Just In Case™), She wouldn't lose a single one.

(I still reckon she cheats!!!)

We were set up in the mess hall, several smaller tables pushed together to make enough space for ten comfortably. Shot glasses and plonk bottles were pooled in various spots over the table, and some of the shipmates were already well into getting plastered.

Harry and I entered to find Iris, Peterson, Georges, Rodgers and some other guys who I can't be bothered mentioning right now, all there. Rodgers was one of those well into his cups.

Harry blinked and looked around with curiosity, following me to a seat opposite Iris. "How do you play?" He asked.

Iris got a wickedly mischievous glint in her eyes as she explained the rules for everyone to hear.

"Oh!" Harry raised his eye brows with wonder. "That sounds like fun!"

I was secretly dismayed at his eagerness, but was also aware that getting naked really didn't bother him. I was even more dismayed however about the way Iris' eyes lit up further and she licked her lips hungrily, all focused at Harry. What the?

"Er, are you sure you want to play?" I whispered. "How about you sit and watch for a while?"

Harry's expression fell like a beaten dog, and I felt like kicking myself. He even pouted. "But," He replied quietly, almost in a whine, "you said that I could play earlier. Remember, when I was sucking your-

Toes! Toes. He has an amazing tongue, ok? And I have a thing about my toes. But the crew didn't know that because I so quickly covered his mouth with my hands, feeling my cheeks burn. Stupid move. I should have just let him finish. "Not in front of the others!" I hissed. Harry gave me a confused look, but said no more. I released his mouth to the sound of snickers.

"Aw, gwan! Let yer sex slave play." Rodgers slurred loudly, leaning across the table at us. "It's not like ya haven seen idall bifore."

I leaned threateningly across at Rodgers, but Iris' giggles distracted me. "You are such an arse!"

She snorted at our slurry shipmate. He crossed his arms and scowled.

"You're just pissed you don't have an Iniri all of you're own to shag." One of the other guys teased.

"That's not nice!" Georges slapped his hand down on the table angrily. "Everyone just shut up and let's play!" Georges' face was also quite flushed, but I think it was more from the plonk than emotion.

"I love the way you think!" Iris grinned at the poor kid, and began to deal the cards.

Harry ended up watching the game from my knee the first few rounds, as expected all of us except Iris losing an article of clothing each time. I hadn't realised just how much Harry was taking in until I unbuttoned my shirt and was taking it off. Then he growled low in his throat, almost like a dog, and tensed, digging his fingernails into my back and side.

"Woah." I breathed in his ear with surprise and pain. "What's that about."

He turned dangerously narrowed eyes up at me. "You're my mate." He growled, quickly biting me on the neck where my dog tag chain was, only just not breaking my skin. "You are not to loose!"

All eyes were on us with this display. More crude comments flowed our way. "Uh-"

Then before I could do anything more, he took the cards from my hands and began to play in my stead.

"Hey, is that legal?" Peterson turned to Iris.

She snorted. "I ain't complaining."

She should have. Turns out Harry's a bigger card shark than she is.

I never would have guessed that Iris had paw prints tattooed on her bust. Wonders never cease.

After beating the tar out of Iris and everyone else, Harry thanked the near naked (and some what paraletic) people around him for a lovely game, turned to grab a fist full of my (now back on) shirt, and dragged me out of there back towards our room. He yawned widely at our doorway, waiting for me to open it.

I was still grinning with amusement and pride as I ushered him inside and closed the door behind us. Harry tottered bleary-eyed over to the bed, lying down fully clothed. I took off my boots before crawling up beside him to kiss his closed eyes.

"You still awake?" I asked, buzzed and not really ready to sleep. He grunted. I took off some layers of clothes and peeled back the bedding to lie down under. I pulled him close and nuzzled his ear. "How did you like the game?" I asked huskily.

"It was alright." He sighed sleepily. "Pretty easy really."

"Hmm? How so?"

"Just had to... watch the cards..." Then he was gone. I looked at the clock. He had done very well staying awake so long really. It was very late. For him. Early for me, but oh well. I snuggled down and pulled the blankets over us.

Thank God tomorrow was a day off!

I woke at some horrible time in the wee hours of the morning to a thumping noise. At first I had not noticed it, it had been incorporated into my dream some how, but when I became aware of it, the noise sent my heart sky rocketing. There was someone in my quarters, banging something against the carpeted floor. A slow banging, almost haunting in nature, that had me lying frozen to the spot all senses stretched towards it.

Then I realised that Harry was not beside me. Images of murdered Iniri floated through my mind. Slowly I reached under my bed to the pistol I hid there and without making a noise to betray me, switched on the lamp and rolled out of the bed into a defensive crouch; pistol pointed in the direction of the sound.

I blinked.

Harry was kneeling in the middle of the floor holding my battery operated clock above his head to bring it down against the carpet.

I put my pistol back and slowly approached him, watching him continued to try and smash the clock a few times.

"Harry?" I asked quietly from his side. He didn't acknowledge me, in fact his eyes were only half open and were empty of awareness. "Are you trying to kill my clock? My father gave that to me." Gently, when the clock was held above his head I snatched it from his fingers. He brought his hands down to his lap and looked at his palms in a dream-like confused way, blinking a few times. Then he whimpered slightly and slowly raised his hands to cover his ears, bringing his head down towards his knees at the same time.

I took the batteries out of the clock and instantly he was relaxed and snoring softly with his face smunched against the carpet and his ass in the air.

I placed the clock on the ground and rolled him onto his side to make it easier to lift him and carry him back to the bed.

I spent the rest of the night with my head to his chest listening to the steady drum of his heart instead of the tick of the clock.

Real tickers are much more comforting.

In the morning Harry was awake before me, kissing and nibbling, stroking me and generally being very affectionate.

"Good morning!" He chirped with a huge smile that I don't usually see while he is on board. "Did you sleep well?"

And I thought I was a morning person. "Fine," I replied. "a bit disturbed."

He frowned slightly. "Why? Bad dream? Not too bad I hope."

I grasped his hand and brought his fingers to my lips to kiss his knuckles. "Just some one trying to kill my favorite clock in the night."

His eyes widened with alarm, and he looked around. "What happened? Were you injured? Where are they?"

I snorted my laughter. "It was you, silly."

"Me?!" He shook his head in denial, almost horror even.

"Yes, you. I think the ticking bothered you so I took out the batteries to turn it off. I take it you slept well?"

Harry slowly nodded, his eyes still wide. "Yes, the best I've had here."

Harry lead me through his forest, tall trees the size of houses on either side of us on the way along the leaf littered pathway, all with ferns and mosses of various levels of size and spikiness springing forth from the bark. Bark, which I might add, more often than not appeared to have flowed from the branches above like honey, or lava. Some of the folds were thick as my body and curled along side each other like strips of bacon. I have never seen anything quite like it Earth side, but then again since the Amazons were declared (whatever) over a hundred years ago, images from there stopped coming. And did I mention the GREEN of this place? It called to my heart just by seeing it. I don't know how to explain the beauty of the colour except that for about half an hour I had to sit on a moss and leaf coated log gathering my breath and rubbing the tingles from my skin. Harry sat patiently beside me, leaning into the tree and looking very comfortable as he gently rubbed my back with one hand.

Beams of light streamed down through the canopy, fading from sight about a meter from the leaf-littered ground, or landing like spotlights upon delicate flowers of a fluroecent blue and pale pink shaped like coiled crescent moons. Creatures that I decided might as well be titled butterflies danced about in the light, some bigger than my hands and vivid green and blue like the Ulysees back Earth side, others tiny and yellow with other colours mixed in. Many more smaller (to various degrees) trees shot up all around us like great straight and oh-so-tall telephone poles. Vines the size of ship ropes hung down all around us, and entwined though out it all were these delicate looking creepers with tiny bell-like white flowers. Above us birds called out in high pinging bell rings and flew around collecting bugs and branches for their nests. It was all very beautiful.

"Where are we going?" I asked as Harry lead me down a track leading off of the one we were on. A smaller one that while still well used, only had one man width to use instead of five. Harry looked coyly back over his shoulder at me.

"You'll see." He said in a quiet way that made my skin tingle. He held my hand as we walked, climbing up small rocky mounds to reach a higher level of ground, or at times down and across small gullies. Gradually I realised I could hear the sound of rushing water, which shocked me because there had been no visuals of open water from above the atmosphere. And then after walking a few more minutes we came to the edge of a small cliff, a piece of land that sloped sharply down to a large round pool of water. On the side of it opposite us I could see the waterfall feeding it from the mountains above, water pouring down the rocks above in what could have been trickles, or even between the rocks, then all converging together at an overhang to form the waterfall about two meters above the pool's surface. To the left of where we stood I could see the water overflowing rocks to continue down the mountainside over and around the roots of trees visual under the water. Over head the canopy of the trees hid the water from the sky, letting shafts of gold flow through to reflect about. The pool it's self was clear, rocks and sand at the bottom where there were not roots. Birds made their bell songs and some dived from the canopy to plunge in and speed out. The pool it's self didn't look too deep, but then again...

Harry walked ahead of me, smiling back in invitation, and climbed down mossy roots, peeling off his shirt as he did so. I chuckled and followed suit, watching as Harry walked naked into the water up to his hips, then swan dived, kicking his legs gracefully to slide through the water like a fish or a mermaid out deeper. He surfaced, arching his spine, and ran his hands through his hair to keep it dangling down his back, out of his face, then turned back to smile at me. I jumped into the cold after him, causing him to squawk and splutter with all the splashes and waves I made,

giggling as I dog-paddled over to him. I flicked my hair about, splashing him again, and grinned as he swam away from me, daring me to catch him. So I chased him around the pool, the both of us giggling and splashing like children, until I managed to snag hold of his arm and wrap my arm around his middle, pressing myself against his backside. Harry moaned softly and melted back into my arms, turning in the water to wrap his arms around my neck to pull my head down for a hungry kiss. A kiss that grew deeper and hungrier for the both of us, and I swam us to the edge of the pool next to the waterfall until our feet touched ground and his back touched the rock beside it. We broke apart, and we were both panting with desire, the coolness of the water not at all effecting either of our arousals. He turned without a word, just a coy smile and raised his hands to the moist rock at his head level, tilting his hips back so that the water broke about the curves of his backside. He spread his legs, revealing all to me and blinked back over his shoulder, pressing his chest to the rock.

As soon as I entered him I knew the difference. He moaned long, but full of pleasure as I held still and whispered "Are you sure?" into his ear.

"Yesssss..." He hissed, and pushed back onto me further, gasping and shuddering all over. "More," He gasped, tilting his head back so I could suck and nip at his neck and ears. "It feels... so good..." His words desperately aroused me now that I knew he was not at all in pain, and I pulled him back with my hands gripping his hip bones and pressed myself against his body, letting our rhythms merge.

Harry always had made wonderful noises, but now they were even better, more desperate, more pleased than before. His voice alone made me hot as hell, and pushed me harder, faster. My pleasure sang in my ears along with the sounds of wet flesh smacking wet flesh, then I erupted inside him and Harry threw his head back and screamed, entire body convulsing around me, sucking more pleasure from my body, and making my knees weak.

Gasping, I pressed my forehead against his shoulder, clinging to him, hearing/feeling his heart speeding in his chest, while he stood sprawled against the rock wall like a squished animal. Slowly we pulled apart from each other, and he turned shyly towards me. His cheeks were splashed with that red, and I felt giddy with happiness. I grinned, swooped down, capturing him in my arms, and swung him around in circles a few times splashing water everywhere and kissing him over and over while he giggled. I pressed my forehead against his and whispered "I love you."

Harry pulled back to look up at me, his own eyes shining bright as his smile. Then he flung himself against me hard enough to knock me off balance in the water and squeezed me tight around my middle. He rubbed his face against my chest and shoulder like a Very affectionate cat, babbling happily in his language and laughing as I almost submerged both of us before I got my feet under me again. I swam backwards with him holding me until I reached the side of the pool that we had entered from. I was starting to feel chilled, and there was a lovely flat boulder there that the canopy was open over letting the sun heat it up. Harry let go of me and climbed up on it, then helped me up. I lay back against the hot rock, hissing slightly at the temperature while he sat at the edge wringing his hair out back into the pool. I lay with one arm cushioning my head, the other gently stroking patterns on the small of his back while he did so. I knew I was grinning like an idiot, but I didn't care. It didn't bother me that just days ago the idea of a child between us almost grossed me out, now I was excited about it.

"How long?" I whispered. Harry looked back over his shoulder and down at me, one eye brow raised in question. "How long does it take... Uh, until your babies are born?" Did that sound really corny? I didn't really know how else to ask.

Harry looked slightly puzzled, then shrugged, smiling. "I don't know." I blinked with shock. "A while, I guess. Why?"

"Just curious." I said. "Why don't you know?" I hoped he had more of an explanation than "I'm too young/inexperienced to know these things".

Harry shrugged again. "Every one is different. It's usually within..." His eyes looked up as he mentally calculated. "A year. Human. But sometimes it can be longer, sometimes less. It just depends."

"Ah. Okay." We sat quietly like that for a few minutes, me stroking his back, him sitting with his hair slung around to his front, just listening to the birds and the waterfall. I almost drifted to sleep, when my stomach gurgled loudly letting us know I was hungry. I opened my eyes to find Harry leaning over me looking very amused.

"What." I blushed.

"Wait here." He ran his fingers through my hair, head butted me gently, then looked up and around at the tree tops. Finding what he was looking for, he scampered past me and up a tree with the ease of a monkey, his naked body very nice to watch. Within a few minutes he was almost out of my sight amongst the tree tops.

"Catch!" He called out, and I just blinked stupidly as a purple something about the size of my fist sailed down through the air. I flinched as I reached up to catch it and didn't quite have the timing right so that it exploded against my out-stretched hand in a mess of sticky jelly-like mess. Harry cackled loudly with belly-clutching enthusiasm. I stuck my tongue out at him and shook the stuff from my hand with a grimace. In the warm sun the juices were thick like honey. I bent to wash it off in the water.

"Sorry," Harry was beside me so suddenly and so silently that I almost jumped back into the pool from shock, which also made him laugh. "You're so funny!" He announced, beaming at me, and held out a couple of those honey-bombs to me like an offering. "I should have remembered you don't know how to catch these. It takes a special kind of practice." I took one from his hand, and he plunked down beside me and took a large bite out of his like one would and apple. Juices and mush escaped onto his lips and hand, before he licked it all off and began to suck the innerds directly from the fruit. He paused when he saw I was just watching him. He licked more juice from his lips and blinked at me. "Why aren't you eating?"

I felt silly now. "Uh, I don't know how it will taste."

Harry snorted like that was the stupidest thing to say in the whole world. "I already told you that nothing tastes bad here. Don't you believe me?"

"It's not that..." But seeing the downcast expression he then wore I fumbled to save face. "I just... like to watch you eat." I decided. That perked him up again, then after that I took a deep breath and bit in like he had.

I expected them to be sour like lemons or some such, but they were... sweet, delicious. I sucked the guts from mine faster than Harry did his, and was surprised to find myself satisfied and full.

Then I slowly realised that I was feeling rather dizzy. Harry was saying my name, asking if I was okay, but he sounded like he was far away and echoing all around, and mixed in with voices of hundreds of people, all talking at different distances and levels of loudness. I pressed my hand against my head trying to shake the dizziness off and failing. Harry pressed his forehead to mine sounding panicked as he called my name. But I could have been wrong because it was about then that everything faded to gray.

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Chapter 13 - Waking Up by Zuzanny

I know this is a short chapter, but it has been a struggle to get this one written.

24 September 2006

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

lionette AT mailcity DOT com

part 13

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Consciousness was a slow thing for me, flowing and swirling around with voices and sensations that were frustrating because on some level I knew I was trying to wake up and just... couldn't quite DO it.

And amongst this, there was an urgency that had the heart monitor beeping quickly and annoyingly in my ears. I knew something horrible had happened and it was all around Harry. Just... IF THEY WOULD STOP DRUGGING ME AND LET ME WAKE UP DAMMIT!!!!!!

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I was drifting again, this time I felt more... there. I could feel the warmth of the blankets around me, their gentle weight. The scent of disinfectant as well as that annoying but slower beep. I didn't feel so panicked now, but I guess that was because of the familiar warm weight that was against my side. Where it should be.

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Voices. Familiar ones, but not the ones I really wanted to hear. The weight was gone.

I sat up with a gasp, memories of panic flooding my mind, making that stupid machine go psycho. I ripped the monitor off my pulse and the iv lines from my wrists, not caring if Iris got pissed at me. I flung the blankets from my legs only to pause.

Ford was standing at the end of my bed, watching me. His hands were once more folded in his green sleeves, and his eyes were wide with a sort of controlled panic. I settled enough to grind out, "Where is he?"

Ford relaxed slightly then. "Resting." He replied. " back in your claimed and marked den."

I blinked, his manner of speaking had... sort of confused me. "My... den?" I echoed trying to figure out what he was meaning. "My room?" Ford inclined his head yes, then looked to the door as Iris came charging in calling me all sorts of nasty-yet-affectionate things for ripping out her life saving equipment. I felt she was lucky I didn't smash the stuff, it bugged me so.

"When can I get out of here?" I cut into her flow of words. At that she turned all professional and checked my reflexes etc...

"You find life when others would have perished." Ford continued while Iris did her medical stuff. "The Creator has blessed this life you live."

"You know what, Ford?" I said with annoyance dripping. "Unless you can tell me what is going on, I really don't want to hear your voice." I wanted Harry. MY Harry.

Ford sighed deeply, long suffering, searching the roof for guidance. Iris was looking back and forth between the two of us her own eyes wide. Finally Ford looked back at me. "You have been gifted with the knowledge of our kind. Child-of-the-forest-who-is-ever-wondering should not have given you this gift, but it is now done. What happened after is more for Child-of-the-forest-who-is-ever-wondering to tell. However, my understanding of the matter is that Flower-of-the-sunshine came to claim Child-of-the-forest-who-is-ever-wondering as life-long mate, attempting to murder you to do so, and was defeated. You are very Creator blessed. Child-of-the-forest-who-is-ever-wondering could have easily allowed Flower-of-the-sunshine to have claimed him, yet CHOSE to stay with you. You, a creature of a completely different life-stream to ours, as a life-long mate." Then Ford bowed deeply, which had me stunned. "Your children will shine as bright lights both sun shining and not. Their beauty will be spoken of for all future generations." Then he walked out.

I stared at him wondering WHAT THE HELL he was jabbering on about, and WHAT HAD HE BEEN DRINKING?!?!?

Iris was staring at me, wearing the same sort of expression, then it turned guarded and calculated at the same time. "What was that about?"

"I dunno. I think it was something to do with Harry, coz he called himself 'a child of the forest' before. But I dunno who 'Flower-of -the-sunshine' is." I looked up at her. "What happened. Really. In English."

She gave me a slight smile at that. "In English? Well, lets see... It was your day off. Around 2pm your distress signal went off, and we were able to track it through the jungle to a waterfall and pool next to which you were lying unconscious and naked." Her lip twitched again at that. "Harry was crouched over you like... well, like a wild dog really. He growled at us like one when we came near. It took us a while of coax him enough to let us check the two of you out. He was covered in cuts, bruises upon his arms in a distinct hand print, like he had been forcefully held down, and had blood all over his face and mouth. We thought he had ripped your throat out, the way it was dripping from his mouth, only you had no visible injuries. The other Iniri... THAT was a different matter."

"The other Iniri?" I echoed, watching as she moved from one side of my bed to another.

"Yes. He was quite dead." A pause. "Harry had torn HIS throat out with his teeth." Another pause. "So, you understood what Ford was saying before?"

I nodded with a shrug. "Pretty much. He was talking kind of strange though, don't you think? I mean that whole 'Child-of-the-forest-who-is-ever-wondering' thing was a bit much."

Iris shrugged. "I wouldn't know." She gave me a pointed look. "He was speaking Iniri."

.....

My mind was a blur of questions as I stalked back to my quarters. I knew Harry would be there, and the instinct to make sure he was okay, that our child was still okay, was almost worse than my demand for answers.

Georges and Peterson were standing guard outside my room, or just standing really.

"We had to turn the lights off to calm him down." Peterson explained as I keyed my pass in. "He was really agitated. Worse than the little guy with Elfondso." I frowned and walked in with my two ship mates following me. "We thought it would be best to wait for you to wake up for questioning. Harry was... well, hysterical."

Georges agreed with him. "He couldn't seem to recognize us. Just about broke my heart out the way he was screaming when he was separated from you."

Harry was lying in the bed looking almost relaxed in the small splinters of light coming in through the blinds, arms resting by his head and shoulder. However his eyes moved as in REM sleep, and he made small distressed noises every few seconds like he was having a nightmare. The hand lying near his face twitched, claw-like. There was no blood visible, and he was dressed in one of my shirts, making me wonder if he had cleaned himself or if he had been "helped". His cheeks still had that tell-tale redness to them, which made me release the breath I had been holding. But I still didn't know if...

I flicked the blinds open and immediately his eyes shot open, wide, wild and bloodshot. He surged up with a cry, then gasped when he saw I was beside him. He flung his arms around my neck and clung tight, frantically rubbing his forehead against my face, and sobbing loudly. Tears streamed from his eyes and smeared all over my face. I held him and ran my hand in circles over his back to try and calm him. Eventually he calmed enough to rest his head against my chest and shudder, tears still dripping. Georges handed me a tissue which I used to wipe Harry's face down with..

"Are you okay?" I asked hesitantly. Harry slowly shook his head no.

"He was supposed to be my friend." It was barely a whisper, and an echo of Ford's conversation that flashed through my mind.

"Did he hurt you?"

"He tried to." That was bitterly said, then he fell quiet.

"Harry," I nudged him gently. "Tell me. Please." So Harry did.

Apparently Harry discovered I had been stung by one of their wasp-like cridders, and set off my alarm. Only that was not the only problem. His former best friend Theoryn/ Flower-of-the-Sunshine (I was getting a double hit of meanings while he spoke), had been watching us together in secret and decided that Harry really should be with one of his own kind. Instead of going through the proper rituals such as openly challenging me for Harry's ownership, he decided to just kill me. The bug was what had knocked me out, but he was wanting to crush my skull with a rock.. I was very lucky that Harry was not inclined to see me dead.

"He said he wanted to purge you completely from my body!" Harry cried out, hands protectively low over his belly. "The things he said! There was no way I was going to let him do that! So when he tried to... When he tried to..." Harry's eyes changed with an expression that... frightened me. "I killed him!" It was growled out. "I tore his throat out! I have rid the world of a voice that would spread his lies! A voice that spewed forth putrid soul poison like a dying nettle-rose! He dared defy the sanctity of our joining, and with out validity to justify, chose to desecrate us!" Harry was getting worked up, and I was kind of freaked out by the whole thing. I'd never seen him behave this way. His whole body was tense, like wire about to snap, and there was that ferocity in his eyes, the snarl in his voice...

"But he didn't do that, right?" I tried to sooth him. "You managed to stop him in time." I nuzzled the side of his neck, and slid my hands low to where our child was just beginning and whispered in his ear "You saved us both." Instantly Harry relaxed against me. I looked back at Georges and Peterson, letting them know they could go now, which I was thankful they did.

I had Harry lie back as I unbuttoned the shirt he wore, sliding it away from his skin. He shifted enough to help me undress him, but I think mostly he was exhausted, so was not as enthusiastic about getting naked as he usually was. But I was fine with that. I ran my fingers over his chest

and arms, stroking and massaging, kissing the places where there were still slight scratches and bruising. Harry made soft noises of appreciation when I started kissing my way down his centerline. I left his slacks on, riding very low on his hips, so low that I could see the tops of his pubic hair, and ran my hands over the silky skin of his sides. I kissed him right on that spot that makes him twitch and he moaned loudly as he did so. I settled myself comfortably between his legs, using his belly as a pillow, and listened to the soothing sounds of his stomach gurgling. His fingers lightly stoked my hair for a while as we lay like that, before his hand went slack and he really was asleep.

I began to wonder if maybe we could take a holiday.

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Chapter 14 - Garden Deck by Zuzanny

2008- 14 April 2009

AUTHOR'S NOTE: WARNING! This chapter contains light discussions of subjects some people have very strong feelings/opinions on. The discussion within this chapter is just that: Discussion. So I don't want people flaming me because I didn't tag their party line or some such rubbish.

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

lionette AT mailcity DOT com

Part 14

I lay spooned behind Harry, my head propped up on my hand as I ran my other hand through his hair. He was breathing slowly, but not quite slow enough for him to actually be asleep. The sun light coming though the window didn't seem to make much of a difference to him. And perhaps resting was the best idea. I was still trying to come to terms with the fact he had saved my life. I wasn't sure how I felt about it to tell the truth. While I am relieved to be alive of course, the fact he chose me over his lifetime friend actually kind of disturbs me. I kept thinking What else could I get him to do? What else would he be willing to do for me? The question of power, the temptation I know it would bring...

I shook my head. I must resist. Great power and the responsibility and all that.

Also... that someone so small could defend me with such strength and viciousness... I am in awe of this.

But now I needed to deal with the fall out.

"I'm sorry." I said, and meant it. "I'm so sorry for all this."

"...what do you mean?" He asked quietly.

"It's all my fault. If I hadn't goaded you into coming down the valley with me, none of this would have happened."

Harry was quiet for some time. In some way I was hoping/expecting him to brush it off with a simple 'that's alright', but that was not the response I got. "You're right." He solomly said instead. "It is because of you." Again he was quiet for a while before speaking. "Sometimes I wonder what I would be doing right now if I had never met you. Would I be climbing through the forest? Would I be collecting food alongside my kin? Would I be dancing on the mountain side waiting for the clouds to fall? But it doesn't matter. I'm not doing that. I probably never will again. And while

some things are very painful for me, and I would like them not to have happened," He grasped my hand and squeezed. "I will always treasure you." The way he said it, it was like he was expecting something terrible to happen. Like someone saying goodbye before they are led off to be executed for something they didn't do.

The door chimed, making me pause my stroking of his hair and roll away. He didn't move as I padded across to the door to find Ford standing there waiting, again with his hands folded across his body under his sleeves, and his face a mixture of nerves and calm.

"Goodmorning." I said, running my hand through the mess on my own head. "What can I do for you?"

"Goodmorning," He echoed, then peered past me into the room briefly, curiosity fluttering there on his face for a moment, reducing his age to my eyes. "Am I interrupting?" He asked quietly, his expression returning to normal as he looked back at me.

I rubbed my face with my hands, shook my head, and motioned for him to enter with my arm. Ford stepped past me and into the center of my room where he stood still and gazed across at Harry. When I closed the door and came to stand beside him, Ford turned to watch me. I crossed my arms and leaned against the wall, waiting. After a few moments Ford turned back to Harry and then moved to sit stiffly on the bed.

"Child-of-the-forest-who-is-ever-wandering," Ford spoke in Iniri (once again I heard gibberish with my ears and the meaning in my head). Harry's ears twitched, but otherwise he remained still. "I have spoken with the family of Flower-of-the-sunshine." He paused. After a few moments Harry sighed and rolled to face Ford, his eyes red and puffy from crying.

"What action do they demand?" Harry asked in Iniri.

"None."

Harry blinked, then frowned, his brow creasing with confusion. "None? My understanding... fails." His voice croaked at the end.

"His family leave you holding no responsibility, stating their child had already been taken by the Jakre ten awakenings prior."

Harry's eyes widened with horror, and he clutched at his heart, a shocked noise escaping him. "I deny..." He breathed, his face whiter than normal, only the pink of his cheeks standing out. "I query then, that possibility. What name held the life-spark I extinguished?"

"The physical manifestation once belonged to the life-spark of Flower-of-the-sunshine, however he was no longer present. He had already passed when his physical manifestation was corrupted."

"I query?"

"As stated, the family of that child witnessed his destruction by the Jakre by the Asendac. Mourning had been enacted since that time. The reason behind the physical manifestation that attempted to defile your sacred bond is not yet understood. The presence should not be possible."

"Yet it was." Harry closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. "I am disturbed in increasing measures."

Ford concurred.

So did I.

"So," I cut in. Both Iniri looked at me with their heads tilted to one side. "Are you saying this... guy... was a zombie?" They both blinked with confusion before Ford recited the online dictionary, waiting for me to confirm it was the right word in my language. When I did, Ford blinked, looked me steadily in the eyes and said, "Yes."

Harry shuddered, and quickly wrapped his arms around himself. I rushed to him, hugging him as he shivered wildly.

"Will he return?" Harry whispered in my language. "Will we be safe?" He leaned heavily against me.

"I don't know?"

"Where is IT now?" The distaste in Harry's voice was almost visible in the air.

Ford looked at me, silent. Harry pulled back to also look me in the eyes, quietly asking my name.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" I asked. "I've been here since last night. I don't know what's going on."

"I believe that Iris has custody of... the body... and is interested in examining it. From the inside."

"You're letting her do an autopsy?!"

Ford tilted his head to the side. "Of course."

It was my turn to blink with shock. "Wow. Ok. I just wasn't sure you guys would be ok with that sort of thing." I paused. "You do know what happens during an autopsy, right? How the body gets all cut up?"

"Yes. The life-spark left it many days ago. This situation should not have happened. We all want to know why."

Iris closed the door behind herself as she entered the meeting room. Ford and myself were there waiting alongside Peterson and some of the other medicos. Harry, although curious and a little clingy, didn't want to leave our room, and Iris wanted the appearance of formality to be kept... Which made me more concerned than anything. She sat down at the head of the table, pressing some points on the table's data screen.

"Well," She said. "If I hadn't known he'd been up and attacking Harry, I would have sworn I just autopsied a ten day old corpse."

I blinked. Ford just waited for her to continue.

"And not just a corpse, but more of Those Plants." She ran her fingers over the desktop controls and an image of flesh and bone appeared in front of each of us. "This is his cerviacle spine." She explained using the pointer that also appeared on each of our images. "Here, here, here, and here you can see the plant fillaments and where they infiltrated the nerve branches. They are present the full length of his spine." Tiny, barely visible, thread-like things were woven through the flesh and tissues like thread worms. "The plant itself" she continued. "was located anterior and superior of the cerebellum. Again here," An image of what I think was a cut open skull containing brain matter now appeared before us. "you can see the extent the plants' fillaments have infiltrated the tissues, gaining control over the body's ability to move. It's rather amazing really."

"How do you know he was really dead beforehand?" I asked.

Iris' mouth twitched slightly before she flicked through a few more gory slides to one in particular that showed the gaping serated slashes through peeking intestines. "Also, there were larvea. Lots of larvae. And a distinctive odor."

"Harry said he recognised his scent." I butted in. "How could that be possible if the guy had been decomposing for over a week?"

Iris frowned. "I don't know."

"Perhaps the plant was able to keep the... body... from decomposing normally." That was Ford jumping in, himself flicking through the slides of gore with his head tilted to the side slightly. "There was an awefull amount of fresh blood, and that was after the Jackre had taken him."

Peterson leaned forward. "Is that possible?"

Ford turned his head to look at the other head medico. "I would not be surprised. If this plant were... controling 'Theoryn's shell, then it would need it to last for as long as possible. Especially given what it was trying to do." The other crew members started talking amongst themselves, discussing theories and possibilities. Ford continued to flick through the slides, a frown deepening on his face. "I find it disconcerting the amount of interest these plants are showing towards Harry."

"Huh?" Both Iris and I said, and all other discussion froze.

"Wait a minute," Iris jumped in. "You can't actually mean that these plant are... that they may be... sentient?"

Ford blinked calmly. "Why not?"

"Well for one thing... because they are PLANTS!"

Again Ford blinked. "So?"

Harry was absent from our room when I returned after the meeting, which after the things Ford had said sent me almost into a panic. But I took deep breaths and calmed myself, instead going to the onboard computer to track him down. I was expecting him to be outside munching on the grass as he had been in the past, so I was surprised when the computer locked onto him on the uppermost life support deck. So up the elevator I went to find him.

Stepping out of the elevator to walls of cool, soothing, green in all directions, I looked up at the domed roof that was currently turned transparent to let the Tselzry sunlight in. Fluffy clouds slowly drifted along in the blue sky, and if you didn't know better, you would have no idea this was not an Earthside sky above us. I went through the clear superplex airlock that was between the elevator and the gardens on this deck, and was immediately hit with cooler, moist, earth-scented air, and the sounds of running water and forrest birds. I took quick glances down the paths that lead from this inner circle off in all directions like the spokes of a wheel, and when I could see no one along those pathes, turned back to the center of the room that housed the elevator, and above that, on this side of the airlock, the observation and control tower. I made my way up the ramp to the observation deck where I found two of the life support crew seated at one of the many table there, drinking coffee and reading datapads. They both looked up at my approach, waving their greetings.

Des, the head of life support, smiled, his face crinkled in a way that showed he had lived a lot of

his life outdoors and mostly smiling. His hair was virtually white, long at the back, and pulled into a tight plait, and his also white beard was neatly trimmed. He was dressed in the same uniform all the crew had, but his held the patch on the chest with the stylised tree that designated him life support. The fact he wore no rank on his shoulders indicated he was not military or security, but a civilian contractor (and probably more of an expert than any of the other crew could ever dream of being). Des knew his stuff, and was a damned good bloke too. The woman seated at the table with him was his youngest daughter, following in her father's footsteps. She was blond and wore her hair in the same style- minus the facial hair of course. I'm pretty sure her name was Laura, but I never really spent much time around her, and she wasn't anywhere near as friendly as Des. She barely glanced in my direction before turning back to her datapads.

Des approached me, hand out in welcome. "I was wondering how long it would be before you were up!" He grinned at me. "Harry's been here for a few hours now. We were starting to worry something had happened to you."

I blushed with the realisation that I was so obvious in my dealings with Harry that the whole crew seemed to know about it, but I covered this up with a shrug. "I was in a meeting." I said as a way of explanation.

"Ah," Des clapped a hand on my shoulder and ushered me through the doors of the lab. The lab was full of monitoring equipment showing the flow of water being purified and the levels of humidity as well as soil acidity. There were charts for growing the various types of vegetation hanging on every wall, and real books on book shelves. Des was one of the few remaining Earthside who were able to work the soil without the use of the chemicals that were in the last few hundred years proven to be poisoning the planet and the people. It was mainly because of him and his team that the rest of us had fresh vegetables that actually tasted better than any available Earthside (and also made great grog!!!), pure water to drink, a toilet system that recycled everything- which may be kind of yuck to think too deeply upon so I don't- and most importantly... Des' plants meant we had fresh air to breath. These were some of the reasons why Des and his team were the most respected, protected (and highest paid) members of the crew.

"It's been a while since I saw Harry last." Des continued. "He seemed to really enjoy the plant encyclopedia I lent him."

Ah, so that's where he got it from. "Yes, I've been meaning to bring him back here. We've just been, um..."

"Busy." Des supplied with a grin that could have been implying things (that were actually VERY true), or simply that he understood how hectic life in general could be.

"Yeah," I said, hoping I wasn't blushing again.

"Well I sure am glad you have both come by. It's a tad bit boring with just us around. I like the way Harry gushes about my gardens. Keeps this old man happy, it sure does."

Harry looked over at us from the other side of the room, away from a large box he had been peering intently into, and grinned with delight as he called my name. He bounced over to us with excitement (which I can't describe how good that made me feel to see his face light up like that after the last few days. It had me grinning in response). "You have got to come look at this!" He grabbed my hand and tugged me over towards the box. "I have never seen anything so wonderful!"

Des followed behind us at a more sedate pace, smiling indulgently. Harry crouched in front of the box again, pulling me down to beside him, then pointed through a little window on the side. The box was actually an old fashioned incubator, with sunlights turned down upon dozens of eggs... and the chicks that had just recently hatched. Some were still on their way to cracking the eggs

open, and every now and then movement could be seen from within some of the shells. The little chicks had tiny wings and yellow puffs for bodies, and walked around on legs that seemed far too big to suit them. They chirped at each other as they wandered around their containment, sometimes standing on egg shells, and sometimes on their fellow hatchlings. Harry was virtually plastered to the window, cooing softly with adoration.

"Look look look!" He pointed at an egg that had cracks in it and was pulsating as the chick slowly worked its hole bigger.

"It can take days for a chick to hatch." Des informed me as Harry went back to his soft cooing. (And was it me, or did the chicks all look in Harry's direction and gather a little closer when he did that?)

"I didn't know we had chooks on board, Des."

Des gave me a sly look. "Of course we do. Keeps the garden healthy."

"Ah." I sure hope there is no possibility of bird flu or some other illness that could contaminate the planet.

"Besides," Des added quietly. "The eggs make good eating." Before I could make any comment or query, Des opened the side door of the box and reached in to pull out a scared chick. "Here," He handed it to Harry, whose eyes were wide with shock. "Have a hold."

Cautiously Harry reached out to get the chick, cooing that soft coo of his that while had no words, expressed peace and calm, and stroking the chick's trembling body. Slowly the chick calmed and sat quite calmly in Harry's arms. "So soft," Harry breathed as he stroked the little thing.

"Well I never." Des looked at all the other chicks who had also sat down calmly in the sawdust at the bottom of the box in the corner closest to Harry. They were no longer chirping with any sort of anxiety or panic that was expected for this type of situation. "I have never seen anything like this before."

Harry just looked up from the chick in his arms and beamed.

"I am amazed at the similarities of life forms between our planets." Harry chattered away happily as we walked hand in hand back to the mess hall. I was seriously looking forward to some coffee, and didn't think Harry had eaten at all yet. "Although I shouldn't be surprised." He continued. "We were all created by the same one after all."

"Huh?" Was my eloquent contribution.

"I know some of your science says you came about by macroevolution, but really. Sometimes I wonder how you humans can be so smart with all your technology and things, and yet be so stupid!"

I yanked him to a stop. "What? No, hang on. We have evidence that proves evolution-"

"Oh please." Harry rolled his eyes and spoke in such a human manner that I had to force myself to remember he was not one of us. "I have read those articles on your onboard computer, and they have absolutely no grasp on reality. I've read the histories stored there too. This teaching is very new to your planet in the grand scheme of things. I'm surprised you are still being taught that since there is far more scientific evidence that proves you were created, just like we were. It's like saying-" He then said something in his language that really made no sense to me. Something like "a Lallyput is a Sassensismer because it is square." (Don't ask me what that meant, because seriously, I had no idea. And I still don't.)

Then he froze, a look of horror upon his face, and he ducked his head. "I'm sorry." His voice lost the happy, teasing tone it had just moments before. "I didn't mean to disrespect your religion. Please forgive me. My punishment is in your hands."

I blinked, chilled. "You didn't disrespect my religion." I told him quickly. "Coz I don't have one."

"...Oh." He frowned, blinking his big eyes up at me, before tilting his head to the side, and looking at me like I was some strange kind of puzzle. "How strange."

I shrugged. "Depends on your point of view, I guess. I've never really thought about the whole creation-verses-evolution thing. I suppose I don't even know what each of them really mean. And does it really matter anyway?" I continued walking. Harry followed after, watching me, silent. "What do you mean by creation? How do you know you were created and that you didn't evolve?" By this time we made it to the mess hall and stood in front of the counter trying to decide what to get. Harry gave me a look that said it was obvious.

"I asked The One Who Remembers, that's how."

Iniri live for thousands of years, I get that. Really I do. But how old would this guy have to be? There is no way this could be possible. No one lives that long, right?

"If you want, I could introduce you to him?"

"Uh, sure."

"Wonderful. You would need to tell Iris that you will be gone for a while though. His house is many days journey from here."

"Okay. That may take some organising. What if Iris wanted to come along too?"

"I'm sure that would be fine. Bring along anyone you would like, I say." He grinned his sunshine grin up at me.

"Okay. Let me discuss this with the crew." I'm sure the bosses wouldn't mind another expedition, especially if it turns out this One Who Remembers guy is some form of computer or A.I. They'd be very interested, I'm sure. Probably pee themselves with excitement and jump the next ship out here so they could claim it for themselves.

Harry hummed happily to himself, one hand pressed over his belly as we continued to wait for the line to shorten. "Des knows The Creator," he said suddenly. "And so do the Chicks."

I wasn't sure what to say to that, so I said nothing. I just waited until it was my turn and ignored the looks we got from my fellow crewmates. I had a feeling this was going to be a long day.

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Chapter 15 - We're off to see the wizard... maybe. by Zuzanny
Retyped after a virus wiped my laptop.

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

lionette AT mailcity DOT com

Part 15

After Harry and I had visited the mess hall and eaten our fill, he happily went back to our room, and after a long lingering kiss that involved a whole lot of tongue and not near enough of other things that I would have liked to have indulged in right then, I went off to chat with Iris.

"So you think it may be some kind of A.I.?" Iris asked me about 'The One Who Remembers' after I told her about it. Peterson, Rodgers and some other techy/science guys (whose names I can't ever remember) were also there at the time. Ford was missing (AGAIN), and although Harry had said that I needed to discuss the idea with my own people, I would have really liked his input.

Oh well.

"I haven't got the faintest idea." I replied.

"The technology required for an A.I is far beyond anything the Iniri could possibly have." One of the techy's said the obvious, which made me want to roll my eyes.

"They did have some kind of cataclysm some time back." Rodgers said to my surprise. I didn't know he had known about that. "Perhaps it's left over from that."

"If it is some kind of left over technology, it could be the cause of that energy pulse that keeps knocking our stuff out. It would be worth investigating either way." Again a techy.

"I hate to put a damper on all your hopes and dreams," I butted in. "but I think we should be prepared for the possibility that it is just some really, really, really old guy."

We discussed some more, planned out possibilities, and even though it could all be for nothing, our little expedition was approved. And even though Harry had already assured me that the forest would provide for all our needs, we all left that meeting prepared to leave bright and early in the morning with enough resources to last two weeks out in the wild.

Harry was very happy to see me when I got back to our room. And I mean HAPPY. He threw his arms around my neck and jumped up to wrap his legs around my waist as soon as I was through the door. His happiness was rather obvious when pressed against my belly, even if he hadn't been kissing me like crazy. (I guess I wasn't the only one who would have liked to have been indulged earlier. Heh.) I wrapped my arms around him, and stalked across the room to dump him on the bed. He lay there still attached at my neck and waist, grinning widely and rubbing himself against my own Very Happy happiness in a suggestive manner, while I leaned over him, mirroring the grin. He pulled himself up so he could whisper in my ear "I want to taste you." before falling back to the bed.

"Oh yeah?" I purred, rocking my hips against him. Then just to stir him I said "Already getting cravings, hmm?"

Harry let his arms drop from my neck to land above his head and arched against me with hooded eyes. "Mmmmm hmmm." He answered.

The next thing I knew I was flat on my back, naked from the waist down and... Oooooooooohhhhhh my Gooooooooooooooooodnesssssss! He sure was tasting me!

Harry liked to sit on the sink's bench top and watch me shave in the mornings. He'd perch there

with this curious lilt to his head, hands clutching the bench edge and his bare feet dangling in front of the cupboard doors. I would lather up and cut away at the bristles of my beard and he would watch. Iniri don't grow beards apparently. Or most kinds of body hair that many humans would remove daily. They just have their fuzz, so Harry found my shaving fascinating. He just didn't understand why I would want to alter my natural appearance in any way, but eventually had to accept that I preferred to look this way, so that was why. Harry also liked to run his fingertips over my face and neck both before and after the shave to feel the different textures. Actually, I've noticed he likes to run his fingers through the hair all over my body, be it the top of my head, my arms, or... elsewhere. I actually asked him about why he did it once, and he answered that it feels nice. I also think it feels nice when he does it, so I let him when ever he wants.

Harry was surprised to see our little hunting party gathered all together after dawn. Especially with the packs of supplies. Harry wore his native style in red, and went bare foot. (I had to tie a yellow band around my arm before he would even let me out the door that morning. He's a pretty strong thing when he wants to be, I'll give him that.). Iris explained that while, yes, the fruit of the forest may be fine for us to eat in theory, but we really couldn't be sure what it would do to digestive systems that were not used to them. So thank you Harry, but would would be bringing our own food.

Frankly, I agreed with Iris. There was only so much fruit and berries I could eat without going crazy. I was looking forward to my rehydrated dehydrated steak tonight!

Thankfully, Harry was easily appeased, just shrugged and turned to lead the way across the field our ship was "parked" in. We walked in the opposite direction to the one leading to his village, towards shadowy overgrowth and trees with vines sporting white and blue spikey flowery things hanging amongst them. "For the full day before we get there, you will all have to only eat plant matter." Harry said firmly before we reached the forest edge. "The One Who Remembers may not welcome you otherwise."

Yeah,sure. What ever you say.

I came after Harry, followed by Iris and the techy/science guys, and at our rear came Rodgers. I was really hoping he would be able to keep his head pulled in during this little trip. It would be so tempting to "loose" him otherwise.

Harry pointed out various plants, the flowers, fruits, bugs and other cridders that the techys Oooo'd and Ahhhh'd over as we walked. They took images as we went, asking Harry to explain what each thing was, and how it could be used for what. Harry of course explained fully, which they also dutifully and excitedly recorded. I would try to stand patiently while each thing was googled over, but I quickly found myself wondering how much faster we would be travelling if it were just Harry and I going.

Have you ever had the feeling that you were tine? And I mean insignificantly tiny? That's what the FREAKINGLY HUGE TREES at the base of the mountains make you feel. I thought the tree that housed the Iniri was big.

Well.

When Harry said they live at the top of the mountains to reach the conopys easier, I didn't realise he mean because the trees were actually TALLER THAN THE MOUNTAINS!!!! Because of this, the planet looked deceptively flat. The plant life is so dense that our sensors couldn't tell at all.

The mountains were like these tiny little mounds in that had been piled up along side the trees because the trees were too big to climb. Their tiniest roots were bigger than we were.

Turns out our ship was parked on a random plateau at the edge of the mountainside, not actually flat land.

Harry lead us under and around the huge branches that brushed the walkway carved into the mountainside though thousands of years of foot travel. We didn't really have to worry about falling off the mountainside, because it was not actually all that steep. And for all the... trees... there was plenty of light to see where we were going. Some of the space was a bit tight with our packs on, but were managed to keep going. I was expecting to see boulders sticking out all over the place, but they were not at all obvious for someone looking for rocks. Where the brightest patches of sun streamed down, there were odd pink mounds. I was wary of them, especially considering that time I had gone near a pink plant had ended with Harry being... yeah.

But Harry squealed with delight before he bounded over to one of the mounds and before I could grab hold of him, plucked what looked like a rosebud out of a mass of rosebuds with his thumb and forefinger. He turned to show us with wriggling little thing that actually had four tiny, spider-like legs sticking out the bottom of it. Harry giggled to himself, then held the pink, wriggling thing out to me.

"Uh-ah." I shook my head no. "I'm not touching that."

Iris leaned over my shoulder to get a better look. I could hear the others murmuring behind us. "What is it?" She asked.

"Grumpy." Harry replied and giggled some more.

"Huh?" Iris asked brightly without any comprehension of a Chirpy Harry Mood.

"What is it saying?" I asked patiently. "I can't hear it."

Harry frowned slightly. "Oh. I didn't realise that." Then he bit his lip, trying to cover the grin he was wearing. "It's probably just as well you can't hear it. It's demanding I put it down." He chuckled as the wriggling intensified. "I rather creative ways that I had no idea were even possible for me let alone for him!" Then, Harry locked his eyes with mine, brought the rose-thing close to his face, and gave it one, slow, long lick from base to tip.

I winced, then flushed red, flashes of just what the tongue could do filled my... uh, vision.

And I wasn't the only one wincing. All the group were, but thankfully they all had different reasons.

The thing itself stopped wriggling (I don't know if it were terrified of in plain shock!). Harry snorted, burst out laughing, and placed the thing back in the spot he had plucked it from. As soon as it were out of his fingers, all the rest of them started wriggling around, rising up and down in an undulating mass that was actually rather nauseating to watch. Harry continued to giggle, and in Iniri purred "Maybe later" to them. Although I didn't hear it, it was like a collective "Awww! No fair!" went through the lot of them before they slumped with disappointment.

"Why on Earth did you lick that thing?" I demanded as we continued on our way between the branches big enough to be bridges mixed with delicate shrubbery.

"This isn't Earth." Harry reminded me, then shrugged and with hooded eyes and a smirk said, "He just seemed like he needed a good licking."

Oh.

My.

Goodness.

Must control my.... Temperature!

"It's nectar is also a good source of energy." He winked before skipping away up the path, humming to himself.

"Energy." Iris muttered. "Riiiiiiight. More like LSD if you ask me."

Now that Harry had very skill fully pointed out these mounds, I realised they were pretty much everywhere and in all sorts of shapes and sizes. I wondered if they were actually some kind of plant of what they were. Iris beat me to the punch though.

"Harry," She called out to him after the tenth pink-thing mound we had passed in as many minutes. Harry wandered back to be within normal speaking distance. "Are they insects?"

"No," he replied while bouncing on his toes like a little kid. "They are seeds." He pointed to the huge trees around us that had vines hanging from the lower branches like long fingers dragging to the ground. "From these trees. We call them..." He paused, thinking. "Long Reaching," he decided. "because they reach to the ground with their fingers." He mimicked the trees by bending over and reaching towards the dirt path he stood on, wriggling his fingers as he did so. "It doesn't matter how high they grow, they always reach downwards. They only grow on rock, and will stay a seed until they are... encouraged to grow."

"Is that what licking it did?" I asked.

Harry returned to his normal stance and grinned at me. "Yep. Tastes good too."

We continued downwards for several hours, gaining the attention of quite a number of bird-cridders (they fly, OK??? And they have beaks, so I am going to call them birds because I am lazy and they look more like birds than flying lizards or insects to me anyway.). Some particularly large dark green ones with yellow beaks and crests that ranged from grey, blue, violet, red and yellow (hmmm... I think I may be noticing something here...) hopped from branch to branch above us, some swinging around upside down like a clan of monkeys.

"Look at you! Look at you!" I could understand them calling down at us. "It's an Iniri with Funny Colours!"

Harry grinned up at them and called back a greeting in their own language, and three of them left their group swinging around to hang upside down from some branches or roots that were just above our head high, sinking sharp talons into the thick tree bark. The two outer ones of them rotated their heads, like an owl does, to watch us, while the central one hung down in a relaxed manner to "talk" to Harry. The others in the trees also watched us, and the trees around us. The techys all had their recorders out again, snapping away and chattering to each other like tourists. Harry called me to him, introducing me by my name to this creature that I could now see (since I was close enough) did actually have feathers and looked very similar to a very large bird of prey. The three in front of us each had blue crests on their heads, and as I peered closer, I saw different shades of green markings all over their feathers like thumb prints.

"This is Rides-The-Wind." Harry indicated to the middle bird. "He is the leader of his clan. These are his mates Guards- Fearsely and Lands-With-Gentleness."

I waved weakly, unsure what sort of greeting these birds would accept. Harry kept grinning with happiness.

"I had heard on the wind that you had been mated." Rides-The-Wind told Harry, who then wrapped his arms around me. I gave his head a pat with affection. Rides-The-Wind cocked his head to the side to examine us with large, dark brown eyes. "I had also heard on the wind that there was some disturbance regarding your mating." I felt Harry tense next to me until the bird continued. "I am pleased to see that the tales told were incorrect. I will be sure to correct such gossip for you."

"I am thankful to you." Harry replied inclining his head.

Rides-The-Wind then tilted his head to the other side. "Tell me, young one, where do you traverse with The Funny Colours?"

"To The One Who Remembers." Harry replied, brightening again.

Rides-The-Wind made a noise of happiness or approval, and gave himself a shaking that ruffled all his feathers before they settled back to their appropriate places. "I hope you have success in your journey. However, I recommend caution. The Asendac has been empty for many days now. My kin have not been able to track His whereabouts."

"I am thankful to you for this knowledge." Harry again inclined his head. "Be well and fruitful."

Rides-The-Wind inclined his head in return (even though his body was upside down, his head was twisted around the same way as ours.). "Be well, and may your fruit grow strong!" With that he stretched out his wings and as one the whole flock of them took to the air. We watched them go for a few minutes. When I glanced back at Harry, he was smiling softly, and gently rubbing the flat of his belly.

Harry turned away from the disappearing birds to look back at us. He sighed. "We must keep moving." He said in our language before continuing down the path.

"Did you see that?" One of the techys babbled to the others.

"It was almost like those birds were sentient!" Another one.

"I'm beginning to think this whole planet is." Iris added quietly.

"Harry, can I ask you something?" I caught up to him when the pathway opened wide enough to walk side by side, and the ground wasn't quite so steep. Harry turned his green and violet eyes to mine with an inquiring smile.

"Of course." He replied.

Now I just had to figure out how to ask him this. "It's just that something Ford said a while ago has been bothering me, and I just wanted to check to make sure I wasn't doing something wrong."

Harry blinked, indicating with his raised eye brows that I continue.

"Harry... are you..." I took in a breath. "Are you actually an adult? By your own peoples' standards I mean."

Harry snorted with amusement and rolled his eyes. "Of course I am. What was it Ford said that has you doubting this?"

"Well, he sort of told me that even with your age compared to mine, you were really still a child. That's not right though, is it?" Please tell me I haven't been banging a-

"Of course not." Harry smirked at me like I was stupid. "I thought it would have been rather obvious by now."

I coughed into my hand. "That's alright then. It's just that back Earthside there are still different laws and regulations about when someone is considered an adult. For us, here, it is more than just being physically old enough to reproduce."

"I should hope so!" Harry cackled. "And I know. I read about it in your histories. I still find it fascinating what we have in common and what we don't. I suppose I should have discussed you when we first met, but," He lowered his eyes lashes coyly. "I became easily distracted."

I smirked. "So when is an Iniri considered an adult?" I asked. "Do you have to go through an initiation or some kind of rite of passage?"

"I suppose so. Mainly it's when we develop fully so can either plant or bare children. Then we walk the sacred paths for about a year so we can gain our name."

"Wait a minute!" Iris caught up and interrupted us (which had me blushing, wondering how much of the conversation she had been listen to, and how much of a ribbing I was going to get later). "What do you mean by a sacred path? Are they anything like ley lines, or is it some kind of duty you have to perform for a designated time?"

"And what do you mean about your names?" That was a techy who had also gathered close. "Don't your parents give you names after you are born?"

Harry also seemed somewhat startled to be asked these questions by persons other than me. He pushed a fern-like frond out of his path while walking before he answered.

"The sacred paths are hard to explain. I suppose you could consider them similar to the ley lines of Earth, from what your histories say." He frowned slightly. "They are like... the thoughts of the land, spread out to hold it together and separate it at the same time. By walking along these lines we can commune with the land and the Creator, and find direction for our lives."

Oh-kay. I thought, hoping he wasn't going to try and tell me that his whole planet actually was sentient and we were like little bugs crawling around all over it. That 's just a bit far fetched for me. "What about your name?" I re-asked for the techy. "What did your parents call you before you were named now?"

Harry paused again, with his arm outstretched to push another frond away. "You know?" He looked back at me over his shoulder. "I don't actually remember! It was so long ago. Huh." he stared off into the air for a few moments before shrugging and continuing on his way. This track was inclining back upwards, and the plants around us were more wet-land related as far as I could tell. There was a whole lot more fernery-type and moss-type plants here. The path once more decreased in width, and there were tall steps cut into the steep incline which were actually really hard to get enough push to get up with all the stuff on our backs. Very quickly us Earthies were red-faced and panting heavily. Harry was not though. He virtually skipped up the stairs, the little bugger. "Our names are given to us after we have walked the sacred paths." He continued to tell us while he waited for us to catch up to him. Iris and I both found fallen twigs (branches) to use as walking sticks which I think was just as well for us or we may have ended up having heart attacks. "I was named Child-of-the-forest-who-is-ever-wandering because I was too curious, I

guess. I just kept going, not because I couldn't find my way back home, but because I knew I was looking for something that wasn't here yet." His eyes virtually glistened in the streaming sunlight as he smiled softly at me. "Now that I have found what I was looking for, I wonder if I shall have to change my name again."

Aw, so warm and fuzzy! I smiled back at him and shook my head. "I like your name." I panted, which was true. There was something... tingly... about the way Harry's true name sounded. And I think it suited him.

"So," Iris bent over, catching her breath. "Do you name yourself after your travels, or do your elders name you?"

Harry shook his head. "No. We are each named by The One Who Remembers on our return through his lands. Once we have a name we are free to do what ever we want, be it find a mate and start a family, or continuing with wandering and exploring."

We stopped for lunch on a branch the width of a double lane bridge that crossed from one edge of our walkway to a lower edge of the walkway below it. A small stream of water trickled from the rocks and roots somewhere on the rock face far above us, and flowed under the branch-bridge and continued down somewhere far below us. It was a beautiful view down to the green moss and fernery on either side of that trickle, and the sound was very soothing. Harry picked little black berries from a tiny bush peeking out from under branch we were now all reclined on. I had to stop myself from grabbing hold of him because he was right on the edge of the branch-bridge and was leaning over to collect from the bush growing below. I had to remind myself that he was born to live here, and that just because I was an over-protective idiot didn't mean that he would fall while most of his body was actually firmly planted on solid... tree. While Harry munched on berries that were rather bitter for my tastes (he offered them around), the rest of us snacked on our rations and bottled water. Harry refused mine, instead reaching out to the trickling water and cupping his hands to drink from it.

After we had finished eating, Harry stood. "We must continue." He said. "There is much distance to travel before we can reach the camping trees. It is not safe to sleep out in the open and on the ground."

If this forest was out in the open, I'd hate to see what was dangerous about an open field.

Wait.

I already have.

Shit.

It started getting darker the further down into the forest we walked. The overgrowth grew thicker, and there was less space for the light to penetrate the thick canopies. The shadows under the trees increased, in some areas appearing to be completely in shadow. I hoped Harry wouldn't switch off from lack of light here, but so far there seemed to be enough to keep him going. Harry lead us over towards one particular area of deep shadows at the base of one of the huge trees that had blue lights floating around it. The blue lights emerged and disappeared back into the shadows between freaking huge roots, floating around the tree roots, landing on the tick moss that covered everything here like a carpet, or danced around each other. Those lights brightened up the area where ever they floated. Once we were close enough, I saw the jagged edges of split rock that were actually caves, with giant roots growing over them like a veranda.

Harry walked up to this cave in question, placed one hand on a root above him, and leaned in to call through the darkness to the glowing things. Harry's hair and clothing shifted as he was hit with cool airflow from within the cave. One glowing thing changed its direction as it came out of the cave and floated daintily over to land on Harry's outstretched hand. Harry continued to coo softly at it while it crawled around on his hand with its six little insect legs. Its wings glowed iridescent blue when ever they moved, fading to a deep sea blue when still. The wings themselves had four segments, the top most ones being shaped like short diamonds, and the tail ones long and slender, trailing almost ten centimetres behind it like a kite's tail. It had black, thick, furry antenna that were also long and pointed away from its hidden eyes and black body. Harry raised his eyes to mine and smiled softly.

"His name is The-Effect-of-Sunlight-Reflecting-From-Moving-Water-Onto-Rocks." Harry told me.

"Ah." I replied, thinking there was no way I was going to call some kind of butterfly-thing anything that long. "Like a ripple?"

Harry tilted his head to the side and blinked while he considered. "Yes." he nodded once in agreement. "A Ripple. He has agreed to guide us through this area."

"I thought you had been here before." Rodgers piped up, which made me scowl. I had almost forgotten he had come with us. Harry just shrugged his tone away.

"yes, I have. But without him I would not be able to travel much further, and without me, you would not be able to find your way to where you want to go."

"It's the dark, right?" I asked, looking past him into the blackness beyond the tree roots.

"Yes," Harry answered with a seriousness that was unfamiliar to me. "once I stepped past those roots, if A Ripple or another of his kin were not present to provide me with light, I would fall, and with out light, I would never wake up. Then I would be easy prey for the Jakre and his kin."

"You didn't say that thing would be around here!" I snapped my eyes around me, searching out a threat that I sure hoped I would be able to recognise as one before it ate any of us.

"Not yet. But we will have to pass his pool in a few days time, and Rides-The-Wind did say that has been empty for some days now." The butterfly-thing settled on Harry's shoulder slowly shifting his wings to keep the light going, and Harry stepped into the darkness. "Please be careful. There are some steps before we get to the floor."

We all turned our torches on before entering. I don't think Harry knew we had portable light, but he said nothing about it anyway. There were four steps to the floor of an open cavern about the size of a small bedroom. Shining the torches up and around showed us it was actually square in shape and had been cut out of the rock. The wall we came through was riddled with tree roots, some of which sprawled across the floor and through the opposite wall. Some actually dug through the floor. Among the roots was a hive that the ripple-butterflies originated from. Apart from the roots and the hive, the room was bare. The arched doorway on the far wall, however, was not. It was decorated with carvings all the way around it. The techys took more photos. The archway glowed with a blue hue as Harry and Ripple passed through it.

"Harry," Iris' voice made him pause. "What is this place? Did some one live here once?"

Harry frowned. "I don't know."

The roof of the hallway the archway lead to was higher than the arch itself and as we walked we saw other archways on either side of the hall. Each we were all sure had some kind of writing

carved into the rock all the way around them. But if they had any doors, they were shut solid with rock. In some places we had to step over tree roots the size of our legs that had burrowed their way across the floor.

"Have you ever tried to see if there are any rooms behind these?" I asked Harry, pointing to one of the archways as we passed them. He turned his confused gaze my way.

"What do you mean? What rooms would be here? This is all just rock?"

I was surprised by that answer, and I could tell Iris and some of the techys were too. "This is not just rock!" She butted in. "Caves do not naturally shape this way. These archways are carved, obviously this place was important to someone."

Harry just blinked like the thought had never occurred to him. "Perhaps you should ask The One Who remembers."

We passed through another archway, into an open cavern the size and shape of a football stadium. Shining our torches revealed that where the grass would be, however, there was a gaping hole that fell to below our lights' reach. We were on one of many layers of open walkways around that open space. Along the edges were various sized stalactites, stalagmites and columns. Some still dripped an occasional drop of water. The roof of the cavern was covered with them like a great chandelier. Those rock formations glittered and sparkled like diamonds when our torchlight hit them. The walls and floor didn't. The ground we walked showed a pathway though the thick dust that was well used by travelling Iniri or other creatures, and did not vary its path at all. No one else who had walked that path had probably even seen what else was here. Harry stared at it all with open mouth and wide eyes.

"It's so beautiful!" He breathed with wonder. "and so big!" To think this was under our feet all this time! I wonder what could have lived here? It could not possibly be Iniri. I wonder what happened to them?" He then bounced backwards away from the pit edge and ran to peer at an archway we had passed. Out in this section the archways were spaced further apart. Harry ran his hands over the flat area in the centre of one archway, and made a startled noise when the rock shifted like it were sand under his finger tips. He continued brushing the sand-substance away even when I joined him to help. Then his fingers hit something solid. We dug fingers around and pulled whole sheets of the sand-stuff away until the area was cleared and there was something smooth like glass there instead. It sounded like glass when I knocked on it, even shifting slightly with the impact. The torchlight shone through in places where the sand-stuff fell away from the other side as we continued to knock on it. Once most of the sand stuff had fallen off, the glass slid completely sideways, and I recoiled as stale air hit my face.

"Careful," One of the techys' said helpfully. "air could be poisonous."

Joy of joys! Yeah, I'm not stupid, you pricks. (Well, not usually anyway.).

Harry was already in the room before anyone could stop him, with the Ripple flashing its wings in a frantic alien morse code from upon his shoulders. Harry slowly turned around in the centre of the dark room with his head tilted to the side slightly. The Ripple's wings and our torches cut through the gloom to show another rectangular, empty space with rock formations decorating the roof and floor.

"I know." Harry said quietly in Iniri while Ripple continued to flicker about. "I wish there more light too." Suddenly Harry's head shot up and he gasped. "A strange noise has just started, deep under the ground." He called back to us.

"What sort of noise?" Iris demanded, while several of the techys exchanged glances and swung their lights around the open space we still stood in. I wondered if they were thinking of old

Earthside stories of ancient, mythical horrors hidden deep under ground?

Harry tilted his head again, his ears twitching. "It's... like a rumbling. It's quiet, I can barely hear it, but it had just started. It-" Harry jerked his head to the side, and I saw stray bits of his hair swaying in a breeze that wasn't there a second before. "The air flow has changed."

"Get out of there." I ordered, reaching out to him. Harry blinked at with a questioning gaze, but immediately did as I told him. I grabbed hold of his arm to pull him out of the room probably a bit rougher than was necessary, but this place was starting to give me the creeps. Then came the dinging noise from above like fine crystal being tapped with wire before the place was suddenly flooded with brilliant light. We all had to shield our eyes for a few moments.

Harry exclaimed the Iniri equivalent of "O.M.G!" and pulled back out of my grip to gave up at the stalactites that were glowing almost as bright as sunlight and covered the entire roof.

"Air quality is still good." One of the techys breathed with quiet awe after checking one of his gizmos. "Cleaner than it was, even."

"Any ideas what set it off?" Iris asked us all. Non of us did.

"It's so pretty." Harry said dreamily, still staring upwards.

"Come on," I pressed the small of his back to get him moving again. "we need to keep going remember."

"Yeah..." Harry walked, but continued to gaze upwards.

"Do you think the stalactites themselves glow, or they enhance the effect of the roof itself?" Another techy asked.

"No idea." Replied the one with the gizmo, then we were off again, traveling along the path that we could all actually see now. I had to continually nudge Harry to keep his attention away from the lights and on the job of leading the tour.

"So pretty..." He sighed.

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Chapter 16 - Flashback by Zuzanny

I know it's short, but it wanted to be posted!

Please note! This chapter contains the use of "f" words! BEWARE!

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

lionette AT mailcity DOT com

part 16

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The Planet was green. Not blue-green with clouds the way it was back Earth side, but green-green with clouds that swirled around. At first the scientists theorised it was green because of high concentrations of copper in the atmosphere, but the probe results nullified that.

Of course, intellectually we all knew before we saw it up close that it would be green. We had

seen the deep space and the long range images for months before even beginning this mission. But it was green. It really was. I remember that hitting me, just like the first time flying out of my home country as a kid and looking out the window to see the shape of the coast line. And how it really resembled the maps. That was what it was like again now, looking out the windows into the black as soon as we were close enough to get a visual.

And it was green.

I remember how silent and still everyone on deck went as we all watched this ball of green in front of us slowly grow in size, it was like we were all mesmerised. It was only broken by the computer beeping, letting us know we were close enough to send out satellites. So we did. And it wasn't long after that that we were landing on the green planet.

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It was more than 24 hours after landing that my squad and I left the shuttle. During that time, our scientists had been examining the atmospheric compositions to make sure if it were toxic or not, while my team and I observed the surroundings for forms of intelligent life.

After the dust had settled from our landing, there had been some... curiosity from some... animals, I guess you could call them, but no signs of what we would consider intelligent. So exactly one hour after the sun rose on this planet (which was a different time of day to when we landed), my squad and I stepped out of the airlock to walk down the ramp and secure the terrain before the various hordes of scientists in their enviro-suits could rampage and take samples and do other scientist-ish things.

The base of the ramp fell to yellow coloured reed-like grassland that reached up to our waists, that spread out around our ship a few hundred kilometres in each direction. Every now and then there were green leafy plants and other flowering plants mixed in. (I had been surprised that the landing didn't flatten the whole lot of them.). Beyond that it was thick green jungle up into mountain ranges.

At my order, my squad and I split and went off in different directions to scout around. Even though our radios were open, no one spoke until reaching the forest edge.

"I've found nothing." (X) said just as I reached my section of forest. (Y), (Z), (A) and (B) also concurred. I was about to radio the same when the ground where I had attempted to step with my right foot didn't so much as shift as not exist to begin with, and I fell at the perfectly wrong angle for that knee.

I consider myself very manly, but I admit that I may have shrieked like a girl when my knee snapped out of joint and I hit the ground hard. (X) called out to me on the radio while I curled around my leg cursing loudly and trying to breath through the pain.



"I'm alright," I eventually gathered coherency to send out. "Stupid, fucken knee of mine is all."

"Don't tell me," (Y) sent with teasing affection. "You tripped and fell."

"Ha-ha. You are so funny." I sarcastically replied, still trying to breath through the pain so that I could relax enough to put my knee back in place. "Fuck," I hissed through clenched teeth, looking down at that leg. "that angle is so wrong."

"Need any evac?" (A) asked.

"I-" I cut off in surprise as the grass to my left slowly parted as something passed through it and headed in my direction. "I've got movement here!" I hissed out as what ever it was got closer to

me. Being unable to shuffle backwards as my foot was still stuck down that blasted hole, I drew my weapon and held it ready to defend myself in case the what ever it was  that was making purring and clicking sounds now- had teeth and claws. So I was surprised when the grass parted to reveal greenish eyes on a face that looked almost human, with white human-like hair growing from the top of it's head and trailing back through the grass on either side of the shoulders that also looked very human-like. It's ears were in the same place, just... kind of cat-like in shape, and it's skin was very pale, actually shimmering white. It crawled through the grass on hands and feet, knees sticking out the the sides, keeping low and still making those purring and clicking noises. It wore clothes, I realised with some brief hysteria that made me laugh. Grey fabric that shimmered on movement. And after it was almost a meter from me, it sat back, squatting just like a human would, and looked at me in what I would like to say was a thoughtful manner. "Guys..." I breathed, "I have just made contact." And I started describing what I was seeing.

"Stay put. We will evac you ASAP." (A) ordered me.

"Sure, no problem." I replied. "So far I don't think it wants to eat me."

It kept making noises at me while it sat there, alternating between animal noises and gibberish. Finally I said, "If you're trying to talk to me, you might as well stop. I can't understand you at all."

It looked rather surprised at that, if raising of eyebrows was of consistent meaning here, and it's cat-ears twitched and focussed in my direction. Then shock of all shocks, it repeated everything I had just said with the exact same inclination of voice and everything. Then it paused, looking thoughtful as it quietly repeated my words again, stretching parts of them out as it explored the sounds.

I just sat trying to breath with my hands hooked under my knee, until it sighed and looked back up at me. It's eyes widened as it saw my foot was not above ground and that I had issues with my knee, and it scooted closer, talking gentle gibberish as it reached out to run it's hands from my knee down to my barely visible ankle. It's touch was firm on my leg, but did not hurt at all. When it reached my ankle, it pulled something like a spade blade but only made out of thick bark out of a pouch it had tied around it's waist and began to dig around my foot. When I was able to, I rocked back on my backside and freed my foot from the dirt. The alien supported my leg at calf level with one of it's own hands and held my leg against it's body, while the other hand it used to rub tiny circles in my leg in areas around my knee. It made gibberish noises the whole time, but I felt the tension literally running from my leg. Slowly, the alien lifted my leg, still massaging my knee as it did so, until it was with the tiniest of clicks that my knee returned to it's normal position. The relief was instant. While my leg still ached like there was ice wrapped around my bones, it was no longer as agonising as it had been moments before. The alien then reached back again and into it's pouch, pulling out something that I think was some kind of root, then took big, chunky bites out of like it was a carrot, and began chewing. While it was still chewing, it grabbed one of the clumps of reeds beside us by the base, and still holding my foot to it's side, began stripping long leaf layers down like it was peeling a banana and ripping them off. Once it had stripped the plant to it's bones, it ran fingers down my leg again until reaching the elasticised foot holes of my pants. It's fingers froze and it tilted it's head slightly before raising it's eyes to mine and slowly sliding the fingers under the hem, over my boots, and up to my still aching knee.

It's hands were warm.

It turned it's attention back to my knee, and slid the hem of my pants up onto my thigh, prodding a few places around my knee again before spitting out the chewed up root into it's palm and slapped the warm, gooey stuff against my leg. I flinched at the feel of it. The alien held my leg firmly so I couldn't easily pull away, and began smearing the stuff around my skin, which started to tingle to my surprise, and the pain continued to fade. It then reached down to the hole it dug and packed dirt over the chewed root before bandaging my whole knee very professionally with the leaves it had stripped. It gently pulled the leg of my pants down again, fingers hesitating over

my boots. It had bare feet, I saw. Again very human-like in shape.

Without realising it, I found myself relaxing back into the grass, all the pain melting away like ice in warm water. It was wonderful. The alien continued to watch me as it crouched at my feet. I lay back in the grass, sighing in contentment. "You know, this stuff... is almost as good as Morphine." I murmured.

It scooted closer, up toward my hip. "I can't understand." It said with a slight accent and a husky voice. I blinked up, not sure if I should be surprised at it speaking, or if it were just repeating again. "Morrrr-phine?"

I shrugged, feeling indulgent. "It's good for pain relief." I said.

The alien hummed quietly, and lightly ran fingertips over my knee. "It's good forrr pain rel-leaf." It repeated. "Talk to me." Then it spoke more gibberish.

I snorted. "Sure, whatever you say. I'm from Earth, a planet very far away." I raised my arm up and waved vaguely in the air. "Some where way, way out in that direction. Hmmm... I think this may be better than morphine, you are wanting me to tell you stuff right?" I was feeling warm and fuzzy and... cuddly. Which at the time I knew was not quite right, but for the life of me I couldn't be stuffed caring about. I think I rambled on for a while, watching the clouds drifting by in the blue sky above us. My attention was brought back to the alien when it gibbered another sentence or so and then pressed its hand to my chest.

"Hmmm?" I raised an eye brow at it, and it took its hand from my chest and repeated the gibberish it had just said, putting its hand against its own chest. At heart level, if it were human, I noted. Then its hand was back against my chest. Over my heart.

"Talk to me." It said. Its hand went back to its chest. "I-" that same gibberish that was something like Harraglar-(blah-blah-blah-blah with a lot of hacking noises in between.).

"Are you asking my name?" I almost laughed then, and purely because I felt like it, I told it my name, placing my own hand over its warm one against my chest. "Can I call you Harry?"

It smiled softly, repeated my name, drew my hand against its chest, then clearly said "You can call me Harry."

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Chapter 17 - Trav'len by Zuzanny

15/01/2011

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

part 17

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We continued around a rock formation and around a corner and through an arch way. Ahead of us was dark, but as we approached, there came that same dinging sound (like wire tapping against glass), and then the roof would be flooded with light. I looked behind us and saw that the rooms we were no longer in had returned to darkness. It was... unnerving. For me anyway. Possibly for some of the others we were with as well, but no one said anything about the return to darkness, because they were so focussed on the lights in front of us.

The path veered through another archway, and became a descending hallway that would only fit

two of us walking side by side instead of ten or more like just a few moments before. Harry and the Ripple walked in front, then me, then Iris and then everyone else with Rodgers taking up the rear. The air began to heat up as the path we walked on sloped downwards. This was despite the beginnings of water seepage to appear through some of the walls on either side of us, dribbling down to gutters that were carved into the edges of the walkway, almost rust-like in the stains draining down the white rock of the walls. Every few meters they were.

"There are actually holes in the walls!" A techie exclaimed waving his science gizmo about excitedly, and continued chattering to the others about pipes and subterranean plumbing systems.

We continued walking downwards for what seemed like hours until we could definitely hear the sound of running water. We found ourselves hurrying along as the sound got louder and louder, and then running behind Harry towards a doorway we could see ahead of us.

"It will be hard to hear anything through here, so please be careful not to fall in." Harry raised his voice over the already near deafening roar of the water. And that was an understatement as we finally skidded to a stop on the other side of that doorway.

Stallegtights lit the roof as far as the eye could see from between gigantic, interwoven tree roots, revealing a literal ocean. I wondered if this were the place Harry had met that Jack-monster that had taken his arm off... surely it would happen in a place like this?

Harry stared at the dark, fast moving water with wide eyes, and pressed his back against the wall with his shock. His mouth moved, but the thundering water took away any possible chance to hear him. We all clapped our hands over our ears, and after I nudged him a bit, Harry continued to lead us along the pathway that continued to hug the wall.

The pathway eventually divided, or a raised bridge was connected to it and went off across the ocean, but we stayed at the wall side until an opening in the wall ahead about a hundred meters wide let some of the water gush out. This was also where we exited. To view a sheer drop that almost had me wetting myself! The water fell down, down, down... How the hell we could be so far up still and yet have travelled so far down I had no idea. But there was no way there would be anything more than jam remaining if any of us fell from that height.

A long river wound between mountain ranges with the huge trees leaning up and across, dangling branches and vines so that the view was hidden from the sky above. Only our position from under the canopies allowed us to see it. And I had no idea where it ended.

Harry tugged on my sleeve, it was still too loud to hear, and I turned back to catch the attention of everyone else, and we were off walking around the mountainside, waiting for the ringing in our ears to stop.

Harry thanked the Ripple, who then flew up through the tree branches and disappeared over the mountain tops. I morbidly envisioned nasty bird-criders swooping in and snatching the Ripple out of the air. Then I felt bad, and hoped that it was really safe, and got home to its family.

How pathetic.

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You know, Tselzry is beautiful. The greens and browns and flowers are all lovely. The views are breathtaking. The smell, also very pleasant, mixing mud and moss and natural spices that one grows to miss when one is in deep space.

But.

The thing, no the FIRST of many things, that I discovered I didn't like about the place was the lack of decent roads. Walking up and down hills all day on rough tracks that were barely more than slight indentations in the grass, sucked royally. Blisters are a bitch. It didn't seem to matter that we had all been wearing the same boots for years now, Blisters are a BITCH.

And of course, Harry was bare foot, so didn't get any. The lucky sod. It seemed like every five minutes one of us was stopping to peel our boots off and slather creams, bandages, tapes and other precious medical supplies over ankles and heels and toes.

All this perplexed Harry. Of course they don't WEAR shoes where he comes from.

In a fit of disgust (AKA pain, which I've never had that much tolerance for), I yanked my boots and socks off, knotted the laces together and slung them over my shoulder like the baggage they were. I just hoped I didn't catch some nasty super bug/infection that took over your body/mind and made you do horrible things... Some of the others also did the same with their boots. And all that would have been fine, but the path was either covered in sticks or pebbles, or thorny leaf litter, or, I don't know, anything irritating that could possibly exist and be thrown at us. I was surprised there was no shards of glass, although at times it sure felt like it.

I sigh dramatically.

Harry was able to walk over all these things without noticing. Either he was healing instantly all the wounds that would have been gouged into the toes and soles of his feet, or he has really thick skin there. (I may have to explore this in the future and find out more...). Or, I suppose... perhaps he has already slashed his feet up so badly in the past that he no longer has SENSATION down there? No, that wouldn't make any sense. Besides, he's not leaving bloody foot prints to follow.

On the plus side. There didn't seem to be any blood sucking insects to eat us alive. (I hope I didn't speak too soon!!!!)

So anyway... It took us ages to walk through the beautiful- yet very sharp- forest, until we came upon this sort of slender (when compared with the rest of the jungle) stand of trees that kind of reminded me of pine trees mixed with dense thorn bushes. The sharp leaves brushed the ground and were so thick that I couldn't see any actual branches attaching those leaves to the trees. Harry stopped and stared way, way up at the tops of these trees... while we staggered up to collapse behind him in a pile of human sweat.

The bugger wasn't even puffed.

"We stay up there tonight." He said, pointing the few hundred meters up to these tree tops. As one, our entire group let out a resounding groan of exhaustion. Harry shook his head and giggled at us, then dropped to his knees to slither under the thorny branches without getting squewered or scratched up by them.

I exchanged a glance with Iris, who was looking VERY wilted with sweat clumping strands of her hair together in messy tendrils. Sweat trickled down her red face, and just like with the rest of us, her shirt clung to her in uncomfortable wet spots. She dumped her pack with the other groaning techies (who were flopped on their backs in the dirt, too exhausted to even flap at any fly-type bugs). She then staggered over to me on jelly legs.

"Please tell me we don't have to climb that." She pleaded with me.

Harry popped his head out from under the branches. "Safer if you're up there." He replied. But then he seemed to notice just how bad-off we were, and crawled back out into the open. "I

suppose..." He said slowly. "we could rest at the base of the tree. Hopefully that would be safe enough. But I would recommend being higher up. Off the ground at least. Perhaps leave your goods on the ground, then you are not carrying heavy things with you." Then he grabbed onto my arm and tugged me towards the tree. "Come on. It will be getting dark soon."

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The branches above our crawling space at the base of the tree grew outwards like spikes of a wheel, but with only just enough space between each of them for us to slide through if we did not keep our packs on. Each branch was about twelve meters in length from outer leaf to the tree trunk, and wide enough that three of us could comfortably lie next to each other to sleep. Harry scrambled upwards and I followed behind him after shoving my pack close to the base of the tree. The branches then rotated as they grew up, like they were part of a spiral staircase with a very low ceiling, but sometimes they would head in the other direction as well. Climbing up the tree seemed to take forever, but eventually Harry deemed that we had climbed high enough and the crawl space evened out, with thick, soft moss carpeting the entire area. Harry crawled away from the "stairwell" without any apparent fear that there may be gaps between branches to fall through... Possibly because there wasn't. "Many years ago," Harry said slowly as he crawled away from me. "My people built the platforms in these trees. To keep us safe while we slept." There was even some space between this level of branches and the one above us so that we could look out and see the sky... that was starting to turn pink around the edges of the clouds. Harry was about halfway there when he slumped to his side with a small sound that sent adrenaline pumping through my veins and me rushing over to him.

"Harry! Harry!" I yelled while shaking him. He slowly cracked one eye open at me, and smiled with weariness. He grasped my hand and pulled me down to lie in front of him in the oh-so-soft moss, which reluctantly I did.

"Sorry," He breathed, closing his eyes again. "The light fades. I must..." And he was asleep even before the sun had fully set. I reclined on my elbow watching him for a few moments before Rodgers' called out "We're coming up, so get your clothes back on!"

He was so lucky I was too exhausted to move. And that he had people behind him. Because frankly, I wanted to push him down the stairs.

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Harry slept through everyone dragging themselves and their stuff up the "stairs" and setting up camp on the sleeping deck. I decided to leave most of my things down on the ground, bringing up very few things like some water and a snack bar or two. Some of the others had the same idea. But some of the techies has set up light panels and had brought a pack of cards. (Or maybe that was Iris. She was playing with them, so I suppose it doesn't really matter who brought it, they were all doomed to a life of servitude to her.). The air was warm enough that our sweat-sodden clothes had dried off almost as soon as we peeled them off, so we were all looking forward to coming across a stream or something tomorrow to get the stink off of our skins. Iris had brought with her a towel and something she called an "antiperspirant crystal" which she refused to share with anyone, not even as a bet... which told us all that it was worth stealing at any cost.

I left Harry to sleep, and sat by the edge of the platform, looking out into the darkness beyond, peering through the tree tops for any signs of stars. Every now and then I would see one. I turned my head as Rodgers actually came and sat beside me.

"Quite the adventure." He said.

"Yes." I agreed.

We said nothing more to each other as we either watched Iris and the techies battle it out (laughing as they threw insults at one another), or watching for the stars.

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We had several more days that were the same. Walking bush tracks bare-foot, then climbing those trees towards the end of the day. Sometimes there would be wonderful springs of water where we could drink or even splash our faces (Harry wouldn't let us stop for long). Sometimes there would be something weird that Harry would pause briefly and explain to the techies. Did you know that the Iniri hold a special meaning for each and every plant they come across? Harry has been gathering a strange assortment of plants in his little pouch/pocket since we first started travelling, which he says is to give as a gift if we meet anyone ("It is good manners. We may be walking their territory after all.")

So some hand-thick leaf is a greeting if it is green, and farewell if it is brown or withered. Some fern-thing is to do with "fragile innocence". One red berry is "to journey a long way", and another one of a slightly different shade and shape is an accusation of deceitfulness ("NEVER ever give THIS one to a member of the council of elders unless you want them to chase you down and beat you!" So said with a voice telling of experience that just makes me laugh. "None of them have a sense of humour. And they do not forget that easily." Ah, Harry... I wonder at what sorts of things you must have gotten up to as a child....). So on and on this went.

One particular techie seemed to be particularly interested. His name was Faraday, and he liked to get all excited over really strange science-ish things. Especially if it involved some form of mathematics that was so way over my head that it may as well have been in a completely different solar system.

"He's a geek!" I complained to Harry.

Harry just gave me this sideways look, with a slight smile. "Is that human speak for "I'm jealous over this person's abilities"?"

"What?! No! Of course not."

Harry continued to give me A Look.

I pouted. "Well. Maybe." I reluctantly admitted.

Harry patted me on the back in consolation. "There, there." He said, and then continued to walk through the fernery. "You know, I find humans really interesting, and very strange at times. I still don't understand why you all must compete against each other, and try to gain one identity. Why can't you be happy with who you are?"

"Maybe because we don't travel the whole world for over a year and get named by our own One Who Remembers." I muttered. Harry's ears twitched and he paused in his steps to look back at me, right arm extended to keep the ferns out of the path.

"Hmmm...." Harry nodded his head in acceptance. "You're probably right." And he continued walking.

Then Harry froze mid-stride, left arm flying out to slap me in the chest to impede my progress after him. I threw up my own arm with the field signal to stop, and instantly the group did so.

"What is it?" I whispered, leaning in close to Harry, taking in how his ears twitched, and he turned his head about. He was even sniffing the air. His hand against my chest jerked in a gesture that I took to mean "shut up", so I drew my weapon and looked around. All I could see

were vibrant green trees and brown branches so thick I couldn't see through any layers.

Then I noticed that all the "birds" were silent, and my hair started to prickle on the back of my neck. I slowly looked back at the group and saw that those with weapons had also drawn them, and they were all looking around with senses stretched. Harry was tense, breathing shallow, panicked breaths, eyes and ears flicking about at the slightest shifting of leaves or branches in the breeze. Sweat glistened across his forehead and upper lip, which told me that what ever was going on, we were in serious trouble.

"Get down!" He suddenly hissed, dropping to the ground like a stone. We all followed him. Harry scrambled to a bare tree root barely thick enough to hide him behind, and he pressed against it like he was trying to sink inside it. His eyes were wide but fixed past me like I wasn't even there. I noticed he was clutching at his left upper arm, with his nails digging into his skin. The fingers of his left hand were white, bloodless, as they clawed at the dirt, twitching like someone was sending electric shocks through them. His lips were pressed into a thin line.

"Harry?" I belly crawled up next to him. His head lolled in my direction, but his eyes still had the distant horror playing through them.

"Jakre." He barely breathed out. I remembered how he had told me about the monster taking his arm off when he was a kid, and wondered if he was having a flashback. "Here." He continued, but I barely heard it, his lips hardly moved. "Waiting. Behind trees."

"How do you know?" I whispered, and he just gave me this sort of incredulous look that suggested I was incredibly stupid for even asking.

"What do you want me to do?" I added.

"QUIET!" He hissed urgently, and pressed even harder against the tree root.

That was when I heard the shift in the underbrush close by of branches being crushed under foot and the whine of trees as they were literally pushed to the side by something incredibly huge.

Oh my God. We are going to die.

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Chapter 18 - Off With The Fairies by Zuzanny

30/08/2011-05/09/2011

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

part 18

The ground under us trembled and the trees groaned loudly as the Jakre pushed it's bulk through them. I still couldn't see anything, but pressed against the tree trunk as I was, there was no way to look behind without the chance of it seeing me.

Harry was literally shaking all over while curled up tightly into a ball, his left arm jerking about with clawed fingers, like it had a mind of it's own. I dropped my pack and keeping as low as I could, crawled over to him and wrapped myself around him, squeezing him for reassurance.

I was almost shocked into screaming when the trees behind us were pushed to the sides, their roots flinging Harry and I across the track as they were ripped up. I took as much of the fall and skid as I could, wrapped around Harry as I was, and sharp rocks gouged bits out of my shoulder and side and back, but I didn't care right then.

The Jakre's blunt snout was above us, paused as it stood chewing, its scales of grays and blacks blending in with the trees even now. Its underside scales were knit together like alligator skin, and its feet were webbed and clawed and turned inwards like a lizards, but only many hundreds of times bigger. Whatever it was chewing crunched loudly between its teeth and red tinged saliva spiled from its mouth, gelatinous and warm as it fell on us, like a bucket of lukewarm slime. Harry shuddered once then went completely still in my arms, wound tight like a cord.

"Well, well, well..." Its throat expanded like a balloon and I heard the words in my head and a deep rumble like a purr in my ears. "I scent Iniri-flesh before me." It said. "I hear your tender heart, Iniri-flesh, you can not hide from me. The creatures you traverse with scent of tasty flesh also. They look to be easy prey." It turned its head towards the rest of our group, huge blue tongue sliding out to lick the blood smears from its mouth, and tasting the air which sent more spittle raining down. "I receive no answer from you Iniri-flesh?" It then laughed, if that were possible for such a creature. "It matters not to me. I have just fed, and am ever patient. We may converse yet, Iniri-flesh. Either I or one of my kin."

And it started forwards again, walking right over us, big as a drop ship, bigger even, with a huge, muscular tail waving behind it with spiked scales that gouged flesh from the trees as it pushed through them. The ground shook with each step it took and with each tree it tore down in passing. It was several minutes of its lumbering away from us and down the slope for the ground to stop shaking.

Harry let out a deep breath that I hadn't realized he had been holding and with a quiet noise went limp in my arms.

Iris and Rodgers came running over to us. "Sweet-mother-of-something-er-other-on-a-sandwich!" Rodgers swore as he stared after it, down the trail of destruction leading down to the river far below us. "What the HELL was that thing?"

Iris had already pulled out her med kit and was pressing stinging stuff to my skin. I ignored her and grit my teeth against the pain, also trying to ignore the warm trickles that was my own blood. Harry lay in the dirt, staring up into the sky, mouth open as he took deep gasps of air.

"I thought that thing was going to eat us!" Faraday and the others also came running over now that things looked clear.

"So did I." I said. "Lucky for us it had just eaten." I got some strange looks. "It SAID so." I told them. "And didn't the bloody spit give you a clue?" I indicated to the gunk that was still draining from my hair in flowing stings.

Faraday looked like he was going to vomit, and the lucky sod didn't even have to be wearing any of it. It smelled like rotting fish. No wonder Harry was virtually passed out right now. I wished I could have been too. It was rank.

Harry closed his eyes briefly before opening them and looking up at me. "I scent blood." He told me, and for a moment I forgot he was speaking Iniri.

"Yesss..." I said slowly. "Iris is being wonderful and patching me up right now." Harry craned his neck to look past my body to see what she was doing with a confused expression on his face. He didn't try to get up at all, which had me concerned. "Are you hurt at all?" I asked.

He hesitated, taking in a long breath through his teeth. "My... My arm is gone." He was still speaking Iniri, which frustrated the others I could tell, and I had a sinking suspicion about something.

"Harry. Harry!" He didn't respond to that name, so I said "Child of the Forest Who is Ever Wandering!"

He blinked and looked up with an awed kind of surprise that melted into a warm smile. "You know my name." He breathed and reached up with his right hand, trembling as he lightly brushed his fingertips over my cheek. His fingers were cool, just like it would be when someone has suffered a major injury and was bleeding to death. I felt like saying "Of course I know your name, you twit!" but the way he looked around and then asked "What location resides Flower-of-the-Sunshine?" shut my mouth completely.

"What's he saying?" Iris asked me, but I waved her off, wanting to concentrate. I touched his left hand and it was icy. I ran my fingers up the cold length of his arm to the area just below his shoulder where he had previously tried to to show me where the scar was. The difference in temperature was obvious. He twitched when I touched warm skin and made a small noise of pain.

"Theoryn isn't here right now." I said, and I could feel the wide eyes Iris sent me with that. "You're arm-"

"My arm..." Harry's eyes widened and the next thing I knew he flung his head back and let out a long, blood curdling scream of agony. back arching off of the ground like a tightly pulled bow, and right hand clutching at his shoulder. "AAAAAAAARGH! My ARM! MY ARM!" He thrashed about wildly while he screamed and begged. "FLOWER-OF-THE-SUNSHINE!"

"What the HELL!" Rodgers hissed. "Shut him up or that monster will come back!"

"I'm know, I'm trying!" I snapped back at him. "He's talking about his arm being gone."

"Gone?" Iris raised her voice over Harry's screaming to be heard. "What-"

"Oh for BEEP sake!" Rodgers swore again, this time at Iris. "Just dope him so we can get the BEEP out of here!"

I wrapped my arms around him, and pulled him to my chest, rocking him while Iris and Rodgers debated the pros and cons of using our drugs on him untested, even when considering previously performing surgery on him. Harry's left arm hung limply behind him. "Your arm is fine. Harry, your arm is fine. Calm down. Your arm is fine." I breathed into his ear while I rocked him, and sacrificed my hearing to press my forehead against his. Harry took in a long, deep, ragged breath, which paused the screams, and grabbed hold of my shirt with his right hand. "Flower-of-the-sunshine..." He whimpered, pressing his head to my chest. Tears spilled onto my shirt. Harry's body kept spasming while I held him like that, and when he spoke, it was with growing exhaustion. "My arm... He's eating my arm... Flower-of-the-sunshine... please... flower-of-the-sunshine..."

The fluttering of many large wings had the humans in our group looking up and at the incoming forms of those bird-thingies we had met on the first day of our journey. They came swooping in, some staying high in trees, some grabbing onto the fallen branches that pointed up into the air, some coming in for a running landing along the fallen trunks. One of them swooped to land right next to Harry and I, with a noise like someone had just jumped to that spot. It was green and had a blue crest on top of it's head, and came up to my head height, seated as I was.

"Distress cries from Child-Of-the-Forest-Who-is-Ever-Wandering are audible for vast distances!" The bird thing spoke with a hushed urgency, head twisting about seeking danger. "I query, what befell here? The Flock fear Others may be attracted to his distress and seek an easy hunt. Your herd must leave this place."

"Flower-of-the-sunshine..." Harry whimpered.

"We can't, he's our guide." I tried to explain. "We are strangers and don't know where to go." Again Harry whimpered. "He keeps saying his arm is gone, but there is nothing wrong with his arm." Except it was cold, like a dead body.

The bird turned its big brown and gold eyes to me, and I swear you didn't need to be telepathic to hear its displeased thoughts aimed at me. "Ignorant!" It snapped its beak at me. "He clearly states what is needed! I query your hesitation in providing it?"

I just stared at the bird. "Because his friend DIED and in being DEAD can't be here?"

The bird rolled its eyes at me, and turned its head sharply to one of others in a tree. That one took flight to some where I couldn't see, but was back a few minutes later, swooping in to linger in the air beside us, dropping some kind of dirty root at the leader-bird's feet. It then gently glided to land beside that bird. "It was a herd of (some word that I had no idea the meaning of)." The second bird said to the leader one. "One child still lives."

"Go." The first one ordered, and the second one took to the air with great heaves of its wings. Some of the other bird-things followed it. I was snapped out of watching them leave by the first one pecking at my head to get my attention. It indicated to the root at its feet. "Bite. Chew to make pulp." It ordered me. I was about to add some explicative deleted's of my own when the bird continued, "The task requires teeth."

I roughly brushed the worst of the dark soil from the root, trying not to think about worms or germs or that kind of thing, and bit a big chunk out of it with a loud carrot-like crunch. Ignoring the sandy-soil grit against my teeth, the texture was very much like chewing a raw carrot, but with a somewhat bitter and peppery taste. The inside of the root was white with light yellow rings, and I made a disgusted face as I chewed.

"Increase your chewing speed!" The bird ordered me.

I just glared at it, trying to keep the pulp off of my tongue, and resisting the urge to vomit as the taste merged with the rank dead smell. "Tastes like shit." I said while chewing.

"You'd know, eh?" Rodgers smirked at me, and I sent him the one fingered salute.

"Quickly. Administer the pulp to his arm." The bird ordered some more, and I gladly spat the crap out onto my hand (and continued spitting and spluttering), before I smeared the stuff against the area all about Harry's shoulder where the temperature changed dramatically.

Harry gasped loudly, then sighed with relief, purring out "Morrriiiiiiiiiiiiiine..."

Oh.

Oh, it was THAT root. I wondered why my mouth or my hand didn't go numb or something... but my various aches and pains had faded somewhat. Not as much as I expected though...

Harry slumped against me, no longer twitching or moaning in pain, but still not really with us. I pulled his icy arm between us, so it was cradled between our bodies.

"Leave this place." The bird was ordering again. "Continue your journey. Lingering here is dangerous."

"We don't know where to go." I reminded the bird, who then ruffled its feathers and made a very unhappy growling noise.

"You traverse to The One Who Remembers, correct?"

I inclined my head, "Yes."

The bird shook its feathers out again, head twitching about some more before it spoke. "I will lead you to the edge of the territory, your mate may have recovered enough to lead you again by then. Hurry." Then with great heaves of its wings, that bird thing took to the air again. The rest of its group followed.

I ground my teeth and likewise heaved myself to my feet with Harry in my arms. "We gotta go!" I called out to my group, and set off after the bird.

I was... surprised... Faraday was the one to pick up my pack.

I could feel Iris' eyes on me the whole time we walked, that bird flying from tree to tree, gripping onto the bark of branches and trunks with its sharp talons and waiting for us to catch up before it would fly on some more, complaining the whole time of how incredibly slow we were.

"Yeah, yeah," I muttered back to it under my breath. "You're not carrying another person, are you." As far as I was concerned that bird could go jump off a cliff and forget how to fly.

The techies all continued to chatter amongst themselves about what they had seen, and theories about who/what The One Who Remembers could be, and technical stuff that bores me to tears. I didn't really care. Harry was mumbling things. I couldn't really hear them properly, because he literally was mumbling, and his words all jumbled together. Sometimes he even sounded like he was singing to himself. When I spoke to him he didn't respond to me, so I don't even know if he could still hear me. I didn't like it. And he was getting heavy. I adjusted my hold on him, half throwing him over my shoulder, and he started giggling, while his arms hung down my back like he was a rag doll.

"I possess TWO. HANDS!" Harry cackled loudly like a little kid, and I felt him swing his right arm about. "TWOOOOOOOOOO!" He squealed, and then kept laughing like a little kid high on something special.

"Yes, you do." I deadpanned back at him.

"Oh!" He jerked with surprise. "Who speaks?" I felt his head shifting as he looked from side to side. "Does the sky converse with me?"

"No," I said. "It's me."

He paused for a few moments. "I query?" (Which is Iniri for "Huh?" or "WTF?")

"Hello, it's me, carrying you."

He pushed up with his right arm until he was able to look down at me carrying him with my arms wrapped around his knees. "I query your purpose for carrying me." He looked around some more. "What location do you intend to traverse to?"

"I'm just following the bird." I said indicating to the bird in question waiting impatiently. Harry twisted about in my arms again, which made it hard for me to keep a hold of him.

"Guards-Fiercely!" Harry called out excitedly in greeting, and I think tried to wave, but wobbled about and fell back over my shoulder with a grunt. It also messed with my balance, and I stumbled before I slid him off my shoulder and to his own feet, and I held onto him as we both

tried to regain our equilibrium. Harry gave me a panicked look. "My arm!" He breathed, and turned his head to look down at the dangling limb. I quickly touched his face to bring his attention back to me.

"Your arm is fine." I told him. "I put some Flower of the sunshine on it so it doesn't hurt anymore, okay?"

He frowned at me for a few moments, like he wasn't sure what I was saying... which was quite possibly true. But then he smiled brightly, and said, "I accept the words you say." (Which is Iniri for "ok"). His pupils were very dilated, and he swayed while he stood, but I didn't think I could carry him much further even if he couldn't walk.

"Can you walk?" I asked.

"Assuredly!" He cackled back before becoming pensive, and leaned in close to loudly whisper to me. "I request you advise me if my legs are also missing."

"Your legs are fine." I reassured him, to which he seemed happy and so started walking along the path, veering all over the place like a drunk, and still giggling. Eventually he made it over to the tree in which the bird was perched with growing agitation and stood at the base of it, grinning up.

"What pathway do we traverse?" Harry called up brightly, rocking backwards and forwards on his feet while the bird explained where we were going. Harry made the equivalent Iniri noise to a human's "Oooohhhh..."

Iris saddled up to me. "When we do manage to find a safe place, you ARE going to tell me what the hell is going on here." She ordered under her breath, barely moving her mouth. "And when we get back to base-camp, you WILL negotiate in what ever means necessary to allow the rest of the crew to be able to understand their language like you do."

"Not much to understand right now." I returned, also barely moving my mouth.

"Not being able to communicate with an injured crew-mate is not acceptable. Do I make myself clear?"

I gave her a sharp inclination of my head, and then she was strolling forwards again and over to Harry, who only seemed to notice her when she was right next to him. He tilted his head to the side and watched her as she walked past him.

"It's this way, right?" She called out to the bird, who took off in the direction she indicated. The others said nothing, but gave Harry some very strange looks as they also passed him.

"So pretty..." Harry sighed happily as he watched them all move.

"Yes, I know." I said from his side, and wrapped my arm around his shoulders, pulling him tight to my side, and tugging him forward to follow the group. Harry squeaked with surprise, but didn't actually protest in anyway. "Come on, it's time to keep moving."

To be continued...

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Chapter 19 - The One Who Remembers by Zuzanny

17 Jan 2011 to 11 March 2012

Thoughts of an Unnamed Earth Explorer

by Zuzanny

lionette AT mailcity DOT com

part 19.

The One Who Remembers

Harry let me lead him along the pathway with my arms wrapped around him, but he kept looking up at me with this sort of awed yet confused squint. After about half an hour of him staring at me like this I finally broke. "What?" I demanded.

"I find your colourings very attractive." He said, still in Iniri and still obviously drugged to the gills. I just blinked, too tired to answer or even attempt to cover up my sudden blush. Especially when he continued with "The others we traverse with are also very striking, but I find your colours most beautiful." Then he broke into the brightest and loopyest of smiles.

"Uh, thanks." I said urging him forward.

It took a couple hours of walking various inclinations of the mountainside for Harry to stop being loopy in the head. By the time he stopped chattering away like a hyperactive monkey on speed, we had reached a piece of land that was like either a quarry, or a crater that something huge had crashed in. The walls of the gaping hole in the mountainside were striated with layers of rock and earth in deep reds and yellows. Vines dangled down from the forest, and at the very centre there was a pool of water, reflecting the vibrant blue of the sky. The path we were on continued down the face of the rock-walls, past the pool, and towards a cave in the wall. Even from this distance I could see the gigantic statues on either side of the cave entrance, great winged creatures, with seven pairs of wings each, kneeling on one knee and staring out towards us.

"I leave from guidance here." Guards-fiercely swooped to sink great talons into the trunk of the tree I was standing beside. "This territory is safe to rest in."

"Thank you." I said to the bird, who inclined its head regally before launching itself up into the air and away over the trees. We all watched it fly away before turning back to look down the edge of the cliff we were standing on.

Harry sighed loudly and leaned heavily against me. "I'm sorry." He said quietly, and this time in my own language.

"What for?"

He hung his head, eyes turned away. "For loosing myself."

Harry was completely back to his normal cheery self by the time we made it to the floor of the quarry, and he directed us to set up camp against the rock face. He said that we were safe down here because it was considered sacred ground, but we would not be able to meet with The One Who Remembers today because he (Harry) had been wandering with fairies bouncing around in his head instead of collecting the Important Goodies needed to gift The One Who Remembers with. Other wise The One Who Remembers either would not meet with us, or would be highly pissed off. AND it was too late to go gathering them now since in a couple hours it would be sunset.

So we set up our tents and sleeping bags where Harry directed us, scraping away the pebbles and rocks that littered the ground so there would be flat surfaces to lie upon. After sleeping in the tree-houses this as quite novel. Harry turned out to be interested in tent building and was quite helpful. I lay out our sleeping bag- flipping the entrance over to discourage any creepy crawlies

from entering, then went out to find Harry standing at the edge of the water. He was staring out into the distant sky, the setting sun casting pinks and oranges onto the drifting clouds and reflecting on the still surface of the water. The water was so still and so clear it looked like a gigantic sheet of glass. Under the water were more smooth pebbles and rocks. The water was icy cold to touch. In some places reed-like weeds grew at the edge of the water, and the air was filled with songs of the creatures that lived there. Every now and then some kind of bird-thing would swoop down and pluck something from the deeper area of the water, before surging back into the air and carrying it away. I don't know if the things could be classed as fish or eel or something else completely.


Harry reached out and wrapped his arms around me while we both continued to watch the setting sun. Behind us drifted the sounds of my people making camp, clunking food dishes and even laughing. Harry leaned against me, his head pressed against my chest. I wrapped my arms around him too, savouring his warmth and the way his body fit against mine.

"Tomorrow I must go gather gifts." Harry told me. "You will be safe to wait here for me." Before I could protest or say I wanted to go with him, he pulled away slightly to look me in the eyes. "I know the best locations, and I will be quicker on my own. There is no need to worry for me. I have traversed these lands longer than you have lived. I will be back well before sunset."

There was something hard in his eyes that I knew I could not argue with. So I took his hands in mine and kissed his fingers. "If you are not back by sunset," I told him. "I will come looking for you."

He smiled softly at me, and led me back to our tent.

Later, well after it was dark and Harry lay deliciously naked and snoring softly in our sleeping bag, I decided I probably better check on the others who were gathered around a bonfire near the water's edge. They had been gathered there for some time, eating and drinking and playing cards (and losing against Iris as usual). I got some wolf-whistles as I approached.

"We thought we'd never see you again!" One of the techies  "Dredd- called out through flashing perfect white teeth.

"Tempting." I said gaining some giggles, and I plonked myself down next to Iris who was still playing Rodgers. (Everyone else had folded)

"Why are you called 'Dredd' anyway?" Faraday asked from across the fire. "I thought your name was Roberts."

"It is." Dredd said with a smug smile, taking a bite from some bread freshly cooked on the coals.

Iris groaned loudly while the rest of us exchanged looks of confusion. "That is so lame!" She said.

Dredd just grinned at her. "I was born on the 19th of September." He added. "Be thankful my parents didn't name me 'Westly'."

Iris shook her head, covering her face with a hand, and laughing in a pained way.

"The Dread Pirate Roberts, who Never left captives behind." Dredd quoted... or I think he quoted. "I loved that vid as a kid. I can recite the whole thing. In character."

"Please don't" Iris groaned again.

"HAH!" Rodgers called out in triumph as he slapped down his cards. "Beat that!"

Iris sighed loudly and lay her cards down, before sending Rodgers a devilish grin. "Any time, Hot Pants."

"NO!" Rodgers shrieked while we all laughed at him.

"You know what that means..." Faraday egged him on.

"It's not possible! You must have cheated!" Rodgers pointed across at Iris who just laughed at him.

"Moi? Cheat? I don't have to." She grinned at him. "Now," She wiggled her eye brows suggestively at him. "Take em off!"

"Take em off! Take em off!" The others cheered.

At first Rodgers glared at everyone, then he rolled his eyes before standing with a small smile on his face. He started humming some stripping music while he slowly unbuttoned his shirt, performing a show especially for Iris. He slipped the shirt off one arm, then the other and swung it around before throwing it for her to catch.

"Off! Off! Off! Off!" We all cheered together, clapping our hands at the same time. Rodgers kicked off his boots, and continued to strip in exaggerated moves, all the while humming the stripping music.

Hot pants indeed.

I was woken right on dawn by Harry wriggling out of the sleeping bag. "Morning." I said sleepily, watching him stand and gather his clothes to dress. He has lovely skin, so soft and smooth to touch.

"Good morning." He smiled at me while tying various straps around himself. Once fully clothed he straddled me and leaned close to give me a long, deep, lingering kiss. Unfortunately too much cloth was between us for anything more to come of it. He pulled back eventually, and set about braiding his hair. "I must leave soon, if I am to be back before sun set."

"I understand." I ran my hands up and down his back while he braided.

"Please do not eat any flesh today, and remind the others not to either."

"Don't worry, we won't do anything stupid."

Harry snorted at that then rolled to his feet to leave. He paused at the entrance to the tent to look back at me. He trailed in hand up and down the edge of the tent in a sort of shy and pensive manner.

"Harry," I called out to him. He lifted his eyes to me. I smiled at him. "I love you."

He beamed at me, his own perfect white teeth flashing. "I love you too. I will be back as soon as I can." Then he was gone.

I groaned loudly pressing the heels of my hands against my eyes, wondering how the hell I was going to get back to sleep now?

You know, I had never realised how much Harry's presence effected me until he was not there any more. I found myself restless, pacing backwards and forwards around the camp site, unable

to sit still for any amount of time. Time seemed to slow down. I kept checking my watch and the skies in case it was getting late, but it was barely even noon when Iris yelled at me to stop acting like a tom cat in heat and start packing up our camp. So I did. It still seemed to take forever.

So when Harry returned just about an hour later, his hair filled with flowers of all sorts of colours, and carrying a huge arm load of fruits, who could really blame me for tacking him to the ground and smothering him with kisses while he rolled and giggled under me.

"Stop! Stop!" He laughed while I attacked his neck with my teeth and lips. "You'll squish the fruit!"

I did stop, but I still pinned him to the ground and we gazed into each others eyes.

"I guess someone missed you." Iris commented dryly.

I nodded my head vigorously and helped Harry back to his feet. He gave me a playful swat. "I brought enough fruit for each of you to present to The One Who Remembers." He said. "It is very important not to offend him, or he may not speak to us again." Everyone gathered around him now.

"What do we have to do?"

Harry ran through how we would enter the cave each bearing a fruit. He was wearing flowers because he was leading the group. I guess it was some kind of ritual/purification thing. Anyway we all got one of these red, rubbery fruity things to carry and followed Harry into the cave that was the dwelling of The One Who Remembers. We all looked up and up and up at the statues guarding the entrance, the base of each was bigger than a house!

"I wonder who carved them?" Faraday asked out loud. Who ever made them did a great job. And so did who ever tended them. There was no sign of dust or wear. As huge as they were, they were still so lifelike. I felt like it would be nothing for them to simply stand up and walk away if they wanted.

I was also expecting the cave to be pitch black once we were out of the reach of the sun light, but I was wrong. There was a curtain of vines that grew just within the entrance which Harry pushed aside to step through, revealing a vast lit cavern... with no obvious light source. At the very back of the cavern was a pillar with another statue at the top, as though it were seated on a throne. Seven sets of wings hung down on either side of this throne, and it's human-like limbs were crossed like one of the hindu gods back Earth-side. Harry stepped forward enough to place his fruit on a round dais in the centre of the floor, and bowed low before backing away. He turned back his head to us, and indicated we do the same thing. So one by one we did.

I kept looking around waiting for some kind of hologram to appear, or something. I sure didn't expect that statue to open glowing yellow eyes, turn it's head and look down at us. I didn't expect it to unfold it's long, slender limbs, spread it's wings and slide off it's throne to float down towards us like there was virtually no gravity. It stopped, not quite touching the ground, directly in front of Harry. One set of it's wings curled around to cover it's glowing eyes.

"Welcome, Child of the Forest Who Is Ever Wandering." I heard it's voice like a lion's purr though all it seemed to have for a mouth was a straight line carved in a rock mask. "These are some of the Funny Colours I have heard tell about."

"Yes." Harry replied.

The One Who Remembers turned it's head to look at each one of us individual, and even though we could not see it's eyes, I know that I could feel it's gaze like heat burning into me.

"Oh Child," It's voice resonated with sadness. "What have you done?" And it reached out one long finger to press against Harry's forehead. Harry threw his head back with a short cry, and stood frozen, wide eyed mouth open, back arched while The One Who Remembers slowly floated up and down like he was bobbing on a wave.

Harry staggered back a few steps as The One Who Remembers removed it's finger from Harry's forehead. Harry turned his face away from me, hunched over as he wrapped his arms around himself. The One Who Remembers (TOWR for short, I'm getting sick of writing out the full name all the time.) drifted over to me from in front of Harry, thrust an arm out in front of me, preventing me from approaching Harry. "No." I heard it's stern voice in my head although it's mouth did not move at all. "It is your turn, you Stupid, Selfish Human." I blinked up at it's face in shock, feeling anger shoot through me at the insult. "You WILL LISTEN!" It commanded, and I found my mouth clicking shut before anything I would have said had a chance to get out. TOWR hovered in front of me, head turning side to side like a bird looking at me although it's eyes were still covered by the multitudes of feathers from one set of it's wings. "So... You are the one this child would choose destruction for. You have no idea the damage you have done, do you? Like most of your race your ignorance grows as your science teaches you to forget your purpose. The stench of death follows your kind everywhere like the disease you are. Because of you, this one," It inclined it's arm back at Harry. "would chose to forsake all that he is. He would become one of YOU in order to PLEASE you. Because he LOVES you! You foolish, FOOLISH, DISGUSTING creature!" TOWR drew back it's lips that were not actually a stone mask then and bared sharp, shark-like teeth, which also made me step back preparing to be attacked. "You know nothing of life!" It continued. "That is the only reason I will spare yours and will not rip all your kind to shreds right now!" My hand itched to reach for my weapon, and I heard TOWR snort with amusement, lips settling back over those teeth. "You and your THINGS are in my domain now. Your little toys of destruction will not work here." Then it floated back away from us, huge wings spreading out in all directions like an opening flower to their full capacity, fourteen plus meter wing spans each, open eyes and wings glowing bright yellow. I heard amazed gasps from the others with us. It opened it's mouth wide and a ball of yellow light formed there as well, crackling like electricity. The ball of light shot from it's mouth and hovered before Harry who blinked before hesitantly reaching out to grasp it. The glow of the ball faded and revealed a piece of green fruit of some kind that looked kind of like an avocado with a tendril curling down it's side. "You may have one Tselzry year together. After that He must return here and to what he was, or he will die." The wings folded back behind TOWR like butterflies do, and it floated back down gently before Harry again, feet not quite touching the ground. It gently touched Harry's face, tilting his head up by the chin. Tear ran down Harry's face, and yet Harry still leaned into TOWR's touch like a kitten getting a scratch behind the ear. Then gently it said to me "It is his choice to be destroyed by you. It is now your choice to save him. Now go."

I blinked, and we were all back in the grass out side our ship.

"Holy sweet something-a-rather on a sandwich!" Iris swore, and the techies all scrambled excitedly around themselves, chattering all about what ever readings on their gizmos and blah blah how amazing that all was etcetera, blah-di-dah.

I didn't care. My eyes were upon Harry, collapsed to his knees in the grass, holding that fruit in front of him, staring at it intently.

"Harry?" I hesitantly asked, taking a step towards him. "You don't have to-"

He took a deep breath, and bit into the fruit.

Harry took a bite of that strange fruit and before our eyes the entire thing disintegrated into sparkling light that then flew into his mouth like it had a mind of it's own and disappeared. Harry just knelt there in the grass with his eyes closed for a few moments.

I waited.

And waited. Expecting.

I expected something to happen, especially after T.O.W.R.'s performance and that little light show just now. I think Harry did too.

After a few minutes of "crickets" chirping, and us waiting for SOMETHING to happen... Nothing did.

Harry opened his eyes and looked over at me, a slight frown creasing his brow.

"You okay?" I asked, reaching down and giving him a hand to stand.

"yes?" He sounded disappointed. "I don't feel any different." He frowned down at his hands.

"Maybe it didn't work." I suggested. Harry looked sceptical. "At least we don't have to walk back." I added, trying to look on the bright side of things.

And that was when one of the techies (Faraday) decided to do a running cartwheel, screeching like an over-excited child on multiple kinds of coloured lollies, cordials and other forbidden sugars all at once. "YA-HOOOO!" He landed right in front of Harry and I. "Did you SEE that? DID you SEE THAT? THAT, my friends, was instantaneous travel! And the science academy said teleportation was impossible. HA!" He proceeded to cartwheel some more.

"Leave some of your maturity behind during the displacement eh?" Dredd commented wryly, also approaching us.

"HA!" Faraday just pounced on Dredd, knocking him into the long grass to which they both ended up giggling like children.

Harry smiled gently as he watched them play wrestle, and that in turn made me smile.

It's amazing how warm and fuzzy it makes you feel when the one you love smiles.

"Alright everyone!" Iris called for attention with a sharp whistle. "Everyone to medbay for a check over. We don't know what... what just happened... may have done to us."

That sure put a damper on the hysterical giddiness.

Especially when we couldn't get the doors of the ship open remotely coz the sensors had all blown up again. Just as well they are all capable of manual over ride.

"Boy am I glad to see you!" One of Rodgers' mechanical lackies rushed up to him as we managed to pry the hatch open. The lacky was covered in smudges and smelled of fried circuitry. Rodgers cursed and squeezed past the techies who were making their way up the ramp and rushed away with his lacky in the direction of the central hub.

"Supposedly," The Very Excited Faraday started lecturing, still bouncing in his enthusiasm. "When an object is displaced in a manner as theorised teleportation, it is disassembled on the molecular level, and reassembled after the fact."

"Hopefully." Dredd added with a dry voice.

"Do you think that's what happened to us?" Another techie asked, looking rather pale.

"That sounds rather... wasteful." Harry said. I was surprised that he was even listening to the conversation. All techies turned their eyes to him, almost in a "who do you think you are to be discussing SCIENCE with us?" type manner.

Harry shrugged. "The One Who Remembers would not be so wasteful like that. And there are too many things that could go wrong. Disassembling your shell would then release your life-spark, so really, even if your shell was reassembled, you would be dead. There are better ways to suicide."

The techies all blinked at him.

"It's far more productive, and safer, to open a doorway between the location you are, and the location you want to be, and step through it." Harry continued.

We all stopped walking to the med bay to look at him. "It that something you can do?" Iris was the one to ask.

Harry snorted and rolled his eyes. "Of course not! But The One who remembers obviously can. And how else would you explain how we got back here? Alive, and intact, I mean. I suppose it is possible that he did something else, but that makes the most sense to me."

"Would The One Who Remembers do that often?" Iris asked, I bet thinking about that electrical disturbance thing. Well, that's what came to my mind anyway.

"I don't know." Harry shrugged a bit of unfamiliar snark entering his voice. "I've only been there three times. This was the first time I've been... Teleported before." His body tensed as I lay my hand on his shoulder in what should have been a comforting manner. He started to pull away, but I snaked my arm around his waist and drew him close so he couldn't get away.

"what's wrong?" I whispered.

"Nothing." he hissed, glaring up at me. Instantly I released him and he stalked off towards the med bay, leaving us all behind.

"Well... THAT was different." Iris said.

I nodded. I didn't think I liked it either.

Harry was the first one to be examined by Peterson, since he had been the first to arrive. He was holding the swab to his arm from having blood samples taken, and glared at us as we entered.

"Somebody's in a bad mood." Peterson commented to me from under his breath as he greeted us and designated med bays.

"Yeah." I agreed. "Could be something he ate." I didn't want to announce what Harry had decided to do yet. Probably stupid and selfish of me, but apparently that is the kind of person I am.

So after we all had our pokes and prods and scans and jabs (and Rodgers was hunted down to have the same thing done to him.), we were released from med bay and left to our own devices.

To be continued...

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