



Markay

Dense clouds shroud the morning sky from horizon to horizon without a single break. It has been years since Ama spied blue sky, and even then it was only a glimpse. The sudden brightness had dazzled her and she didn't like that. Dimness was part of her world, she had known no other.

The South Georgian Sea was an endless expanse of gentle swells, but it was still early. The wind and waves would build as the day wore on. They must be finished and home by sundown or perish in the nightly storm.

Ama sat in the bow of the canoe, and at the crest of each swell, triangulated the watery landmarks clearly visible to her even in this shadowy light. For the final few meters, she turned her attention to the small scope mounted on the gunwale, putting its camera into the water and directing Markay to a specific spot. "Starboard ten degrees... steady..." She clinched her fist. "We there."

Markay ceased paddling and brought the canoe to a halt. "Sound?"

"Si. Make it so." Ama removed her outer clothes, then cinched the collection belt tight around her narrow waist. She slid the small metal crowbar into its loop and tied it down with a quicknot. While Ama prepared

for the dive, she watched Markay slip the sounding stone into the water and play out the attached rope through the breaking winch. The stone plunged downward, pulling the rope with it, slowed by the winch. The rope itself was marked with a band of white every meter. Eight bands had slipped by when the sea bottom abruptly stopped the descent.

"Eight mets... Good?" Markay asked.

"Si, good." Ama responded.

Markay reversed the brake and started pulling the stone back up. Ama slipped over the side of the canoe and hooked her arm around the outrigger, its carbon black skin smooth to the touch. Markay extended the rope and she expertly looped it about her free hand, gripping it tightly. Ama gulped air, saturating her lungs with oxygen.

"Luck." Markay leaned out to stroke her hair.

Startled, Ama flinched away and looked up. This was unusual behavior for him and the look on his face scared her. "Good 'r bad?"

Markay scowled. "Good a' course. You crazy?"

Neither smiled, simply stared at one another for several long seconds. Ama sensed nothing bad in him. Markay would never hurt her. She sucked in more air.

"You ready?" Markay asked.

Ama took one last deep breath, then nodded.

Markay released the stone into the depths. Ama let it pull her downward, slow at first but building up

speed as she maneuvered into a head-down position. She kicked her feet to accelerate the descent, and watched the bottom grow nearer in the murky water.

To her left, a dark doorway beckoned. She ignored its siren call. Death waited inside and she was much too experienced to fall for its allure. With a twist of her wrist, Ama released her arm from the rope and headed for the roofless ruins to her right, its walls still visible protruding from the sea bed. Finding her marker, she freed the crowbar and forced it into the loose sea bottom. Bracing her feet in the sand, Ama heaved. It was a wall section, thin and sheet-like. Long ribs of disintegrating wood were attached with rusting nails. It came apart but Ama was an old hand at scavenging. Even so, it took her precious time to move it all aside.

There, in the still swirling sand and mud under the remnant, a flash of white caught her eye. Stowing the crowbar, she brushed aside the debris and picked the item up. It was a plate, unbroken, and she could see color on its face. Ama placed it in her pouch. Beneath the plate was something more. She picked it up. It was small but heavy for its size. Not sure what it was, she carefully placed it beside the plate.

More items were visible in the section of sea bottom she had just cleared. A crushed plastic bottle, clear plastic in thin sheets moved in the water like kelp in shifting currents. Here and there bits and pieces of plastic drifted away, but they could wait. Ama knew

she must end this dive. It was only the first of many dives on this, her last day.

Ama swam back to the rope and gave it a tug. Markay started to pull Ama up, stone and all. Ama aided the journey back to the surface going hand over hand, pulling herself upward in rhythm with Markay and the breaking winch. The two had done this many times and it took only a few seconds for her head to breach the surface right next to the canoe. A moment longer and the sounding stone was locked into place awaiting the next dive.

"You find?" Markay asked.

Ama carefully removed the two artifacts from her pouch. "Si, Plastic. Unbroken."

"Nice. Will bring many credits." Markay picked up the other piece. "Metal?" He washed it in the ocean. "Si, gold!"

"Me spy." Ama clung to the side of the canoe as it rose and fell with the ocean swells. Markay handed it to her. It was the figure of a person, a bearded man with long flowing hair, arms spread, ankles crossed, head pitched forward as if sleeping. "Religious?"

"Si." Markay rubbed at its surface. "Christian relic. Jesus on cross. Seen before. Artifact worth much."

"If Jesus."

"It Jesus!" Markay snapped. "I know relics!"

Ama held her tongue while giving the trinket back to Markay. "There more. I get." Ama began sucking in

air in preparation for going back down. Markay started to say something then turned stone-faced and held his tongue. He put the artifacts in the storage box and got ready for Ama's descent.

The sharp cold wind out of the east marked it well past midday when Ama and Markay had what they came for. Their storage locker was full of plastic and assorted treasure from a bygone age. It had been a good day.

Markay put his strong back into the paddle and soon had the canoe skimming over the waves. The wind was cold and sharp coming in off the Atlantic. Ama got dressed, grateful for even that meager protection against the coming storm. She will be glad to reach home.

Her work done, Ama sat quietly and watched the passing. If things go as planned, this was her last dive. She wanted to remember every detail. With time to reflect, Ama's mind wandered. Their route took them by the skeleton of a multi storied concrete building, its bottom floors lost below the waterline. Known to them as Old Trumtoer, it has served as a watery landmark for as long as Ama had been diving. Only now, comparing what it was today with what she remembered from earlier encounters, she realized another wall was missing. Just for fun, Ama strung together the memories she had of this structure over the years. No

doubt about it, the ancient building was disintegrating under the endless beatings it endures every night. Ama concluded it will be gone soon. It gave her great sadness to think that humans, her ancestors, had brought this on themselves. Birds flew in and out of the broken and empty windows above the waterline and waves foamed around it, a warning of sorts of the tempest to come. "Storm tonight." She said.

"Si... every night." Markay replied sarcastically.

Ama ignored him. "Soon Trumtoer be gone."

"Like you." Markay would be the first to admit that Ama annoyed him and he annoyed her. The sound of her voice spurred something inside him to always take the other side, to disagree no matter the argument or subject matter, especially today. It wasn't out of meanness or spite, more of a habit they had fallen into these last six months since Father had disappeared and wasn't there to put a stop to it. "Maybe not. You don't know. Could last another thousand years. Been at least that long already."

Wrong, but Ama resisted taking the bait for the moment. "You wonder what it like before water come? Before storms?"

Markay paused in his rowing, letting the small boat glide under its own momentum. "Elder Lousy says thousands lived here. Never seen thousands. Crowd."

"Elder Lousy is old but not that old. Water come long before him."

"He live here. Born here." Markay plunged the paddle deep and pulled. Within a few strokes, he regained the rhythm of the canoe cutting through the growing waves.

"Irrelevant... I preachin' when Florida lived millions of people."

"Millions? What millions?" Markay snorted his disbelief in time with his strokes.

"Million is thousand thousand." Ama couldn't resist poking him one more time. "More schooling? Study numbers?" Her hands flashed in good humor. Pidgin was as much sign as auditory, but Markay wasn't paying attention.

"No need." Markay was clearly not amused. "Know what million is. Don't believe millions could live here even if water gone. What would they eat? Make zero sense."

"So history books wrong? Elder Lousy right? You right? Know more than Preceptor Trava?"

Preceptor Trava was a major reason Ama was leaving. He had seen Ama was not happy, he knew how intelligent she was. It was absurdly easy to light the flame of going to the University within her. It was even easier to get Magi to notice her. Preceptor had changed Ama's life. Someday she planned on becoming a teacher just like him. But Ama was young and had very little tolerance for what she considered willful ignorance. It threatened her in ways she was just

beginning to understand. It dumbed down her very species and that she could not abide.

"That frakturd Lunarian can kiss my ass!"

"Markay! At very least, Preceptor Trava deserves respect. Disagree if you must, but do not disrespect."

"Like you respect Elder Lousy? Frak that ciegojo punk kid!"

"I wish you wouldn't call him that." Ama hated the word. Technically it meant blind eye, but culturally it meant so much more and none of it good. Ciegojo meant hatred of Lunarians and hatred of their technology, specifically, their visors, all rolled up in one ugly word. "He not punk kid. He older than you."

"Don't look it." Markay slowed then stopped paddling. "Ama, not everything in books. Some things need figuring by oneself. People not responsible for storms or water coming. That ridiculous. Climate change happened, but not our fault."

Ama couldn't help herself, she tried to set him straight one last time. "Science preaches different story. People did burn oil and coal until gone. You do *not* deny?" Ama watched Markay shrug it off. He agreed but obviously put little credence to facts. "Then why believe people had nothing to do with climate change? How can you deny science fact?"

"What fact? Fact ciegojo preach? Or fact Elder Lousy preach? Fact this... from beginning, there never was enough oil on entire Earth to make climate change.

So what we burn it all. Made no difference. Fact this... Earth is huge, we are small. Enough said." Markay plunged his paddle deep in the water and pulled, dismissing Ama's argument out of hand. To him, this factor in the equation was overwhelming. How could he ever change the weather? He couldn't... and thus any argument to the contrary seemed ludicrous.

"It wasn't just one or two polluters, many millions contributed. Preceptor Trava says billions. Not just one person. You may be able to ignore fact, I can't." Ama realized yet again, she would not win this argument today or any day. That made her sad more than anything.

"Lunarians talk shit, including ciegojo Trava! No way billions lived on Earth *EVER*. Total myth. Lunarian propaganda." Markay talked in rhythm with his paddling. "What you want I do? I don't burn oil."

"No oil to burn." Ama shook her head.

"Want to blame humankind for something? Powersats... pbeams overheating world."

"Also providing electricity to world, to your casa." Ama considered explaining one last time how burning hydrocarbons literally changed the atmosphere, or how miniscule the amount of atmospheric heat the pbeams were causing balanced against the heat generated by burning all the oil and coal within the earth's crust. No comparison. Like a drop in an ocean. She didn't bother. She had said it before, many times. Repeating it again

would do no good. "Stop being stupid." She didn't say it loudly but Markay heard her.

Markay stopped paddling and snarled. "Stupid? Frak this! We done! Glad this last dive!"

Ama remained quiet. That was fine with her. The more she learned of history, the more she wondered if Earth had ever supported intelligent life. Just because Markay was her brother and only living relative didn't make him right. In fact, listening to him deny climate change as manmade was embarrassing. She must separate herself from this if she was to keep her sanity let alone succeed at the University. She had big plans, but none of them included Markay. The thought of leaving him and her childhood home made her sad even while it excited her.

Markay didn't utter another word the rest of the way home. Ama wanted to say something to mend the hurt, but they were both stubborn like Father. She had never seen Mother who had died giving Ama life. Sometimes Ama thought that must be why she and Markay didn't see things the same. He was six when Mother died, and could remember her touch, her kindness, her love. To his young mind, Ama had taken Mother from him. Ama couldn't blame him for hating her even though Father had not. But now Father was gone as well. He had been a fisherman and part time relic hunter who didn't come home one night last spring. A week later another hunter found the family

canoe, they are virtually unsinkable, but Father was gone. That's what happens if one is out past the sea wall after sundown when the evening storms kick up. Weather has claimed many lives within their village. Father's demise left Ama and Markay alone in the world for the past six months. Their relationship had not fared well under the circumstance. It was time to make a change.

The waves were noticeably larger by the time they got home. The growing storm rocked the canoe violently as Markay guided them through the narrow passage in the sea wall and out into the bay beyond. Taking a sharp turn to starboard, he plunged his paddle deep getting them away from the turbulence around the entrance and bringing their speed back up. Ama looked out on the relatively calm bay. It was high tide and all she can see is the chain-link tops of the fishery laid out in neat rectangular pens. The village took care of over a hundred different pens, each containing hundreds of thousands of fish and shellfish at various stages of growth. Some were destined to be returned to the wild, some were breeding pairs, but most would end up as someone's dinner. Humanity must eat.

At the other end of the sea wall, beyond the pens, Ama can see the second entrance to the bay. Preceptor Trava had brought her class to the fishery on many occasions using its design and operations to demonstrate various scientific principles. He showed

them how mathematics modeled the shape of the sea wall to enhance the hydrodynamics of ocean water flowing from one entrance to the other. This current carried fish shit out to sea and allowed them to deacidify and oxygenate the incoming water. He taught them the engineering that went into building the stone and concrete sea wall. He demonstrated biodiversity by studying the many different species raised in close proximity within the fishery, as well as explaining quantum biology using the individual fish themselves as examples. This was how Preceptor Trava was able to convince so many villagers to send him their kids. He taught them how the fishery worked. Something useful.

Of course, Preceptor Trava had taken every opportunity to mention it was Lunarians who had designed and built the fishery or that the fishery was the main employer for the village, including Ama's Father when he was living and Markay. This was a point of contention among her classmates, but Ama didn't mind. She thought Preceptor Trava was cute. She told herself that she flirted with him just to piss off Elder Lousy and the other village idiots, including Markay, and it worked, they all had something to say about it and none of it good. She didn't care. They would shun her if they knew what she really wanted to do with Preceptor Trava. Ama grinned. Must give that some more thought.

Ama was shaken from her deliberations when

Markay thrust his paddle deep, using it as a rudder to turn the canoe towards the beach. The bottom made a scraping sound against the sand and ground to a stop. Ama and Markay jumped out and together, pulled the boat out of the water. This spit of sand was only accessible during high tide. Ama helped him pull the canoe across the sand to the iron rail bolted to the common shed and chain it down. Not that anyone would steal it, but the wind might pick it up and fling it about. Better to be safe now than sorry later.

Markay wouldn't even look at her while they unloaded the canoe and put it away. Without saying a word to Ama, the young man retrieved his heavy jacket from the shed and slipped it on. Then he picked up the wooden box filled with ancient artifacts and started up the stone stairs cut into the cliff face. Their village lay at the top of the cliff well away from the water, but in the direct path of the incessant wind and rain.

Ama got her coat from the shed and put it on. She was glad she had it. Cold wind whipped at her as she followed her brother up the stairs. "Markay..." Ama spoke to his back. His attitude was really starting to piss her off.

"What?" Markay stopped but didn't turn around. "Don't have all fraking night."

Ama took a deep breath. "I leave on morrow. Let's not fight."

Markay turned his head to look over his shoulder

and scowled down at her. "Only reason they want you is you pretty mugre!" He spat out the words, then resumed climbing the stairs taking two at a time.

Ama glared angrily. "Had to say one more time, didn't you?" She followed Markay up the stairs but at a slower pace. Why couldn't he see she had to go? It wasn't like she was leaving him with nothing. His half of the treasure they had found over the last month alone would provide Markay with enough credits to eat for a year, maybe longer if he was careful. Their family casa was worth a lot and the canoe four times that. She had made sure they were all legally in Markay's name. It was all she could do. He was on his own and so was she.

The stairs turned into a footpath that wound its way up a ravine to eventually emerge on a plant-covered gently-rolling plain a half kilometer from the cliff. The path led her between the two nearest hills. Upon each hillside, well away from the nightly rush of storm water at the bottom, the Earthborn had built their village using the material at hand, stone and mud. Fifty-six families, over three hundred souls, call Pesqueria home.

Ama could see Markay outside their casa. He glanced back at her before ducking his head and entering their family home. She slowed giving him plenty of time to disappear into his rooms, like he did every night. Ama wondered if Markay would still do

that when he had the casa to himself. Probably not. She hoped he would marry the youngest Timmons girl, Glori, and start his own family. It was what Elder Lousy wanted and it sounded right to her.

She paused outside her door. The wind whipped at her and the first drops were starting to fall. Ama looked at her village in the fading light. Preceptor Trava said the village casa's were ingenious. Dugouts cut deep into the hillside and lined with stone, their roofs covered in earth and green with plants. Only the front wall was visible with a rather small door. No windows. These casa's proved to be warm and tight against the constant wind and nightly rain storms coming off the Atlantic. Much better than the portable metal house Preceptor Trava lived in. He said so himself.

Ama ducked her head and went inside. The front room was warm and dry, and brightly lit, and empty. As usual, Markay was nowhere to be seen. Fine by her. Ama gulped down a sandwich of cornbread and cold fish sticks while stripping naked. She showered quickly, and went to bed. Big day tomorrow. She would need to be sharp.

But she couldn't sleep. Alone in her bed with nothing to distract her, Ama tossed and turned, unable to stop replaying the memories of every encounter she ever had with Preceptor Trava. She couldn't turn it off and she knew why. She was leaving unfinished business here and it bothered her. Apparently more

than she had realized. She finally had to admit to herself she had feelings for the man, dirty, sexual feelings. Why shouldn't she? He was her Preceptor and she may never see him again. It was now or never.

Ama swung her feet out of bed and sat up. What was she thinking? She couldn't just leave. Why not give in to these feelings? But if she went to him and he rejected her, that would be bad. Not to mention Preceptor Trava was a Lunarian. She could expect any midnight encounter to be recorded and placed in public domain. Did she care? Not really. From what she knows about the Lunarians, they would think it entirely appropriate. In fact, they might think badly if she didn't.

That settled it. Ama was dressed in a flash and gathered the things she would take with her. It all fit in a small shoulder bag. Outside was cold and wet. It was fine. Ama was used to this. The wind was an old friend, and being wet was a good thing.

Ama walked confidently through her darkened village. The cloud obscured sun had long set making it pitch black outside, but not to her. She could see quite well in this low light once her eyes adjusted. Instead of continuing down the stairs to the beach, Ama turned and took the path along the cliff.

The main school building was about a half kilometer from the village, past the gardens, and well away from the cliff. Preceptor Trava's metal box was

behind the school, out of sight. Ama took a shortcut across the outdoor play area. The gusting wind made the swings dance and the monkey bars howl. A small bronze plaque set in the wall near the school's front entrance had etched on its face; *Pesqueria Harbinger School - District Nine*

Ama turned the corner and smiled. His lights are on. She knew instantly Preceptor Trava was awake. She could feel him stir. What's more, he sensed she was here. She had taken only a few steps further when his door opened and Preceptor was standing there, silhouetted by the light behind him, tall and lean. Ama continued until she was looking up at him.

"Greetings, Ama. You're out late."

"Something undone." Ama's hands flashed adding emphasis to her Pidgin. They always spoke in Standard. For Ama, Standard was a second language and she needed all the practice she could get. She expected him to correct her, but he didn't.

Instead, Preceptor Trava came down the steps to stand in front of her, all 200 centimeters of him. "What be that?" He asked in Pidgin, hands flashing.

His penetrating gaze was more than she could take. Ama released her inner animal, reached up and drew his lips to hers. Not only did he not offer any resistance, Preceptor Trava picked her up and pulled her to him. She wrapped her legs around his waist and arms around his neck, feeling like she might float

away. The tall Lunarian carried her effortlessly up the steps and inside, shutting the door with a push of his foot.

Early the next morning, well before dawn, having not slept at all, Ama quietly got out of bed and showered. She used the last of his rye soap scrubbing the oily sweat off her body. Preceptor Trava had proven to be a very energetic lover.

Before leaving, she leaned over and brushed her lips against his cheek. Preceptor's eyes fluttered open. "Is it time?"

Ama sensed a depth in this man that belied his youthful appearance. Over many conversations, he had taught her many things and she had come to trust his counsel, but knew next to nothing about the man. He had always deflected questions or refused to answer anything of a personal nature. She didn't even know his name.

In heavily accented Standard, Ama said, "You need not rise. I leaving shortly. I thank you for... everything." Ama's voice cracked, tears blurred her vision.

"Wait. I'll go with you to the bus stop."

Ama shook her head and laid her hand on his bare chest.. "No time. I go soon or miss it. Preach me one last thing, what your name? Full name, name mother give you."

Preceptor Trava smiled indulgently. "Christobal Santiago de Larusso Calatrava, but my friends call me Chris. I would be honored if you would call me Chris. In fact, I insist."

"So now you want to be friends? A little late for that, don't you think?" Ama said in a low sultry voice. "Christobal Santiago de Larusso Calatrava, it rolls off the tongue..."

"Christobal was my mother's great grandfather and Santiago was my father's great grandfather. Larusso was a famous singer and another distant relative. It's tradition in our family to carry the name of at least one dead person from our family. I got three. Anything else you want to know?"

"Si! Many things. Where you born? Where your family? Why you here? When will I see you again?"

Chris chuckled. "Not sure we have time for all the answers. Let's start with the easy ones. Born at Aldrin Station, Republic of Luna. My blood family is deceased, and I am here because your school needed a preceptor and I needed a job." He grinned at her. "As to your last question... Who can predict the future? I can't."

"You know more. I can tell."

Chris shrugged. "What time is the bus coming?"

"Fine, don't tell me." Ama leaned down to kiss him hard, then pushed away. "Adiós por ahora!" She rushed out the door.

Ama brushed the tears away as she hurried through her village one last time. Was she doing the right thing? She didn't know, but that wasn't going to stop her from doing it. She was going to live her life fully and that couldn't happen in this little village.

Dawn was still a half hour away, but Ama had plenty of light to find her way down a path she had travelled many times. She walked out to the main road. The receiving antenna that provided Pesqueria with electricity was spread out on the far side of the road extending both ways as far as she could see. It was a simple affair made up of strong poles holding up a fine netting. Designed to survive the daily storms, it didn't offer much wind resistance and was impervious to the rain.

Walking up to the bus stop, she found someone already there, someone waiting for her.



DeLeon

It was her brother.

"Spend night with Ciegojo!" Markay was angry. "Why?! You only think of you. You think what it do to me? Sister fraking Lunarian? I live here, stay here!"

"You telling? How they find out?"

"You seen! Lynch and Phillip spy you. Already preaching. Soon everyone know. Why you leave me with this?" His hands flashed unhappily.

Markay was overreacting. He was upset over something and who she was fraking wasn't it. "Sorry. Truly sorry. I not do to hurt you. Something I needed. Like my leaving now, something I need do."

Markay was pitiful, his pain etched across his brow in stark lines. "Don't want you gone."

They both heard the high pitched whine of the bus coming. Lights swept over them. Panic overcame what little remained of his dignity and the young man began to cry.

"Stop! What would papa preach." Ama frowned and shook her head. She felt sorry for him but not that sorry. "Tears cannot change history. I must go. Cannot stay here. Not for me. My life is out there. Not here."

The bus stopped and opened the door, inviting her to board. Impulsively, Ama wrapped her arms around Markay in a great bear hug. She whispered in his ear. "Take care, brother. I love you."

She released him and scrambled onto the bus. Ama looked back and waved, but he just stared forlornly at her. Nothing she could do about it. Ama picked a seat on his side of the bus and opened the window. "Puede acariciar el mar!" Ama called out as the big vehicle pulled away, its electric motors whining.

Markay stood looking after her, then pulled something from his pocket. She couldn't quite make out what it was. The bus turned a corner and she lost sight of him.

Ama settled back in her seat. Two emotional goodbyes this morning was enough. Finally she was on her way. She shoved these memories, along with their emotional baggage, into a mental cubbyhole and moved on. Her journey had finally started and nothing was going to spoil it.

She had taken this bus many times, but today was different. This time, she didn't get off at Sheffield Square, the open market where the villagers sold their recovered treasure. From this point forward, everything was new, for the first time, and exhilarating. The airport lay beyond on the far side of town and was a regular stop on the bus route.

Ama had never been on a plane before or even seen

one up close. EarthNet vids didn't do it justice. Walking up to it, the plane didn't look like it could hold the passengers waiting to board, even though its gossamer wings were almost seventy meters tip to tip. The silver fuselage was long and slim, only four seats wide with a narrow aisle down the middle. Its windows seemed larger than she remembered from virtual tours, especially from the inside looking out. There was no pilot. The plane was completely autonomous, just like the bus she had taken that morning. It never occurred to Ama to wonder about this, let alone fear it. This was how it always had been, how it was.

Ama walked the length of the plane before picking the last window seat on the starboard side. She stowed her bag under it, and strapped herself in. From there, she watched and listened to the hubbub as the small plane filled to capacity. She pretended not to notice the handsome young man take the seat next to her, too busy counting the eight magnetoplasma thrusters on her wing. Once the plane was filled, and the door locked shut, all those little engines began to whine. She was keenly aware of every little jerk or vibration as the plane maneuvered to the end of the runway and stopped.

What are they waiting for? It didn't take long. Ama's heart raced with the initial jolt as the plane started moving, slowly at first but picking up speed much faster than she had dreamed possible. The plane

accelerated down the runway, pushing Ama back into her seat, and gracefully soared skyward.

Ama pressed her forehead to the window watching the wing physically change shape right before her eyes. She understood the science behind what was happening, but it still seemed like magic to her. The wing continued getting smaller, more pointed, and more swept back as the ground receded and they gained speed. She had never been this high or this fast. Ama gripped the armrests hard and channeled her rising fear into wonder. How marvelous flying was. It was exhilarating beyond anything she had imagined.

Something touched her hand and Ama jerked it away, turning sharply. It was the young man sitting next to her.

He smiled. "Sorry... My name is Santo DeLeon."

She hesitated then said. "Ama. Ama Blunt."

"Is this your first time in a plane?"

"Si." Ama turned away to look out the window. She wanted to absorb every detail no matter how small. Below her was the tundra of the south. Only the toughest plants could live in such low light conditions and none were very large, most were a dark green creeping vine. From up here, it looked like a carpet covering everything. The plane was still climbing and would soon reach the thick layer of clouds. The wing was much smaller now than when they had taken off and still shrinking. A tiny winglet had appeared at the

very tip.

"How far are you going?" Santo asked.

Ama turned back to him. Santo was nice looking and not much older than Markay. It would be a long flight. Might as well enjoy the company. "Quito."

"Quito? Ecuador? The Center of the World?" When Ama nodded, Santo continued. "What draws you there? Sorry. I was born nosey. One of my many quirks."

Ama paused. The guy's accent sounded odd but nice, what harm could it do to tell him? "Is fine." She shrugged. "No secret. Accepted to University of Luna." Ama spoke in broken Standard, obviously a second language.

"You're going to be a student at UL?" Santo winced. "Going to space?"

Ama sensed some deeper suppressed emotion behind his question. "Maybe. Worry about one thing at time. School first." Ama replied. "What your work?"

"I'm an energy engineer for Rocky Mountain Power. I maintain the power grid out here in the boonies." Santo realized his reference to boonies might not go over very well. "Sorry. Suburbs. I keep the juice flowing in the suburbs."

"Is fine. I born boonie. Makes me boonie bunny." Ama wrinkled her nose at him, flirting. It was something that had worked well for her in the past with village boys. Santo was no different. She can see him respond to her just as she knew he would.

Santo nodded in agreement. "You definitely look like a boonie bunny, a chocolate bunny. Good enough to eat."

"Eat?" Ama acted like she was thinking about it and when she connected the dots, she feigned shock. "Mr. DeLeon! What are you suggesting?"

Santo descended into confusion. "Sorry. Please forgive me."

Ama had learned the ways of boys and girls years ago. Her brother's friends were easy targets, but it was a small village. It gave her a well-earned wild reputation. She knew how to draw interest in a boy, and how to use it to get what she wanted. Ama had Santo on a spit and gave him a slow turn over the fire. "You sorry? Really sorry?"

"Ah, no. Not really." Santo stammered.

"Then why you say three times?" Ama enjoyed watching him squirm.

"You're right. I will stop. What are you planning to study?"

"Everything." Ama shrugged.

"That's a big subject. That would include learning about electroactive materials like those wings? I see how you look at them." Santo pointed past her. The wing was half the size it had been during takeoff and getting smaller as they picked up speed and altitude.

"Maybe. Don't know yet." Entering the clouds, the plane shuddered noticeably causing Ama to gasp and

clutch at the armrests again. Ambient light went from dusky to pitch black like someone had flipped a switch and the plane shook even harder. Small lights inside the cabin came on automatically.

"Turbulence." Santo said. Ama looked at him, the whites of her eyes clearly showing. "Relax. We will be through in a moment." Santo reached for her hand again, but Ama pulled it back.

Emergence from the top side of the clouds came just as sharply. The sudden brightness caused Ama to turn away, shielding her eyes with both hands. She had never seen the sky so open, so blue, so bright. On the positive side, the shaking stopped. Flight was incredibly smooth up here, and quiet. The hum of the thrusters was little more than background noise.

"Here..." Santo was offering her something.

Ama squinted at what he was holding out to her. Shades. Taking them, she adjusted their setting to maximum and slipped them on.

"Much better. Thanks." Santo was wearing an identical pair.

"No one mentioned you might need shades?" Santo asked.

Ama nodded sheepishly. "They in kitchen drawer."

"Good place for them." Santo smiled at the girl. "Safe there."

"Funny." Ama turned away from him and put her forehead against the window. She could no longer see

the ground. Clouds below her looked solid enough to walk on. Blue sky above was empty but bright even with shades.

"Your shades will be waiting for you at home." Santo leaned towards Ama to gaze out her window. It put him almost in her lap.

Ama was well aware of Santo. She could smell him, flowery fragrance with a hint of dead fish. "Not going back. Home lay ahead." The thought excited her, almost as much as this boys hot breath on her cheek.

"I've heard that before." If Santo was trying for worldly, it came out all wrong.

Ama turned to him, bringing her face very close to his. "Really? How many boonie bunnies you know?"

Being this near to her, Santo lost himself for just a moment, experiencing what every male since time began had, pure unadulterated attraction. All he wanted to do was kiss her, let nature take its course, but guys don't go around assaulting every pretty girl they meet. Evolutionary chemistry battled with civilized reason. Reason won out, as it almost always does. He exercised the wisdom to know when to cool it and the strength to actually do it, or in this case, not do it. Pent up emotion manifested as a hard knot in the pit of his stomach. "I... Ah... None like you."

"Like me? What you mean?"

"Both beautiful and smart?" Santo made it sound vaguely like a question.

"You saying or asking?"

"Saying."

"Don't know anything about me." Ama laid her hand on his chest and pushed back gently.

Santo settled back in his seat. "I can see you're beautiful and if you're going to the University of Luna, you're smart. What else do I need to know? Have you killed someone? Addict? Criminal?" Santo smiled.

"If I did, wouldn't tell you." Ama smirked. "Going to UL because Preceptor Trava went there and knew people. He got me accepted."

Santo shrugged. "It's always good to know people. However, I also know UL would not take you unless you pass their tests. Like I said... smart."

"What you know about it?" Ama asked.

"I know..." Santo scowled. "Leave it there."

She could see she had hit a nerve. "You took tests?" Ama could sense from his demeanor that he had. "Didn't pass?"

"I passed the written. UL said I didn't meet quota, whatever that means." Bitterness crept into his voice.

Ama realized Santo had not mentioned the active portion of the testing process. "What about the interviews? I skyped with professors, other students, even city administrator on Luna. Did you?"

Santo shrugged. "Sure. All it takes is one person saying no. Someone did. So what? I graduated top of my class from New Dallas Institute of Technology.

NDIT is the best thing that ever happened to me. I love my job, love my life."

"Good. What does energy engineer do, besides hit on boonie bunnies?"

Santo smiled. "Is that what I'm doing? Hitting on you?" He leaned back and chuckled. "Guess it is. Sorry about that."

"More sorry? Don't be sorry. I'm not" Ama smiled.

Like a moth to flame, Santo again turned towards her. "I mostly work on receiving antennas and Calconn power lines in the grid."

A dark shadow passed over Ama. In that weird way our brain associates things, Ama's went from power grid, to power beam, to the overblown notion Markay had of the damage microwave radiation from powersat transmissions was doing to Earth. According to his theory of how stuff works, he believed the beams coming down from the power satellites in orbit was heating up the atmosphere and slowly killing Earth. The emotions of every conversation she and her brother had on the subject coursed through her mind in that instant, and was reflected on her face.

Santo had no clue, he just seen her expression change from carefree to worried. "Is that bad?"

"Ah... no... Was thinking of another."

"I don't understand."

Ama shrugged. "Brother believes pbeams overheating planet."

"You know that's not true, right?" Santo settled back in his seat.

"Si, Of course. But could never convince him of it." Ama said sadly.

"Is that why you left your village?"

Ama paused. "One reason, maybe. I want to do something with my life. Be more than just Sea Woman."

"Sea Woman? I've heard of them. You're a Sea Woman?"

"Si." Ama nodded. "Diver... found many artifacts. How you think this flight paid? Rich parents? UL scholarship for tuition, books, boarding. Must get myself there."

Santo removed his own shades and leaned over bringing his face close to hers. Ama's sunglasses made it difficult but not impossible to get a close look at her eyes. "Remarkable. Yes, I see it now. Your iris is larger. Beautiful... really... quite beautiful."

"Thanks..." Ama again gently laid her hand on his chest and pushed back. "Eyes like mine common in boonies. Didn't I say I boonie bunny?"

Santo settled back in his seat. "Yes... you did, and you are, most certainly. The first Sea Woman I have ever met and you are on your way to UL. Of course, now I understand why you were accepted."

"What you mean?" Something in his tone disturbed Ama.

"Your genes. They want your genes."

"Talkin' what? Genes?" Ama's tone turned sharp.

"Did you submit your DNA to them? Blood sample? Urine? Saliva? All the normal medical tests, right?" Santo asked.

"Si. Was required. Keep talkin'"

"Don't you understand? That's the test you passed. All of the other tests were just for show. You have genes the Lunarians want." Santo seemed completely convinced and sure of himself.

Ama was skeptical, and more than a little annoyed.

Santo could see it in her face. "Sorry, but it's true. Being beautiful and smart didn't get you into the university. It was your genes."

"Stop talkin'." Ama had heard enough. She resented Markay for suggesting she was selected for her looks. Santo suggesting it was for her genes was the same, if not worse. It cheapened her accomplishments. She had passed every test they threw at her with high marks. She earned this the hard way, not because she had the right DNA. The whole idea was preposterous and demeaning. Ama didn't like it one bit. Santo had gone too far. Ama was done, at least for now.

Santo can sense the change in her. "You will love Quito. You can see the Thoth Space Elevator from anywhere in the city. I believe they even have tours. You should go." He sounded desperate.

Ama turned away to gaze out the window ignoring

his feeble attempt to mend fences.

"Don't shoot the messenger." Santo paused. "Look... I'm sorry if I offended you."

Ama didn't turn. "You sorry, now we both sorry. Please... let me enjoy rest of flight in peace."

Santo shrugged and settled back in his seat. "Whatever." He couldn't get the image of her perfect face out of his head.

The descent into New Dallas International Airport was mostly uneventful with one exception. The cloud cover had disappeared several hundred miles back revealing a green land. The sky was clear and blue as far as Ama could see. Even with her shades set on maximum, she was having a hard time with the brightness. Luckily they were flying into the setting sun, keeping it out of sight. It was almost more than she could endure when the plane made a banking turn on approach to the airport causing the sun to shine directly in her window.

Ama groaned, twisted away, and hid her face in her lap. She had never seen any day so bright.

"Attendant! Darken window." Santo ordered. The plane obeyed and darkened the starboard window, Ama's window, greatly reducing the sunlight coming through.

Ama slowly raised her head and looked around. Other starboard passengers had done the same, those

close by looked at her oddly. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it." Santo replied. "Look... I just want to wish you luck at UL. You're right, I'm pissed about not getting in myself. Shouldn't take it out on you. No hard feelings?" Santo extended his hand to her.

"Most Lunarians don't shake hands. Is true?" Ama asked.

Santo nodded. "That is so. I've never been to Luna myself, but I have met a lot of Lunarians. Lunarians don't hug either. No touching at all. That would drive me buggers." His hand was still out there. "But we are Earthborn and we shake like our ancestors."

Ama shook his hand firmly. She has known only one Lunarian, Preceptor Trava, and she had touched him a lot.

"Friends?" Santo asked.

"Si, friends." Ama agreed.

The miniscule speaker embedded in her seat's headrest began to speak. Santo brazenly leaned over so he could listen in. "The connecting flight for Ama Marie Blunt will be boarding at Gate Three, Terminal Two at eight-twenty-one. Boarding will begin thirty minutes in advance. Have a pleasant flight."

"Doesn't give you much time." Santo was disappointed.

"Enough to find a vender." Ama boldly put the idea in his head.

Santo jumped at the bait. "Will you allow me to

treat you to a meal? I know the perfect place. There's a Sonorian Bistro on the roof of Terminal Two that employees human waiters. Do you enjoy TexMex?"

Ama didn't know TexMex, and had never been to any place where people waited on her. Pesqueria had a pub, but that was for drinking, not for eating. Food came from either a vending machine or bought in the market. "Si. Sure, why not? Must eat. You can preach about Thoth Space Elevator. Want to know everything you know. I like learning." Ama smiled. She never could hold a grudge, especially if there was free food involved.

Santo smiled back. "Deal."

Ama and Santo were among the last to leave the plane, shuffling forward behind other passengers. But instead of a set of mobile stairs leading down to the ground like it was at home, waiting at the door was a long tunnel-like corridor. They emerged from it into the main hall of Terminal Two.

Ama had never been inside a building this big. There were more people in this one room than lived in her village. The masses scared her not as individuals, but as a mob. So many faces. She felt greatly outnumbered and alone.

"Are you all right?" Santo asked.

Ama glanced at him and back out at the crowd. "Sure. Fine."

"You don't look fine. Come on." Santo led the way

across the crowded space.

Ama followed closely, almost hanging on his shirttail. She found the people polite, moving aside, letting her through without resistance. Ama cubbyholed them all, gaining confidence with each passing encounter. These were good people just going about their business. She found it increasingly easy to slide past each face and move on. Ama adapted quickly.

"Your gate is over there. Gate Three. The cafe is up here." Santo led her to an escalator that carried them to a balcony high above the terminal floor.

Ama pushed down her fear of high places and peeked over the railing at the people far below. She instantly regretted it. Her glutamate levels spiked, causing Ama to catch her breath and break out in a cold sweat. She moved away from the edge.

"This way." Santo opened a bright blue door, and held it for her. Did he think she couldn't do it for herself? *Si Señor* was painted in big block letters above the door in a garish orange. A tiny Mexican sombrero adorned the S in Señor. "After you, Ama."

She entered. Inside was a small alcove not more than a few meters square. A cantilevered desk jutted from one wall, a paper-thin touch screen above it. A small potted tree and a colorful painting of an ancient Indian pueblo occupied the opposite wall. A wide arched portal directly across from the entrance gave them a decent view onto the dining room beyond. The

café wasn't very big, a few dozen tables and some booths.

"Pierre, the maître d', will seat us." Santo moved past Ama to look out of the portal to the seated customers. A low murmur and the sounds of people eating reached them.

"Is fine. Eat later." Ama turned back towards the door.

"Give him a minute. He will be here shortly."

"Who?" Ama asked.

Santo moved back to her. "Pierre has been running this joint for years. A good friend."

"Docteur DeLeon. So good to see you again." The man seemed to come from nowhere. Tall and slim, he was dressed in a black tux and white gloves. He flashed a radiant smile at Ama then turned it on Santo.

Santo smiled back. "Pierre, good to see you. This is Ama Blunt. She will be joining me for lunch."

"Excellent! Mademoiselle Blunt, the pleasure is all mine." Pierre gave her a slight bow.

"Can you find us a table with a view? This is Ama's first time in our city."

Pierre's smile broadened. "Ruyi. If you care to sit outside, I have an open table for two against the rail on the upper deck?"

Santo turned to Ama. "It's your call. It will be bright. Can you handle outside?"

Since when did anyone care what she wanted? She

wasn't used to this, but the question dug at Ama for another reason. He asked because of her eyes. Her genetics. Again with the DNA.

"Outside fine. Don't worry it." Ama said sharply and instantly regretted it

Pierre raised his eyebrows at her tone. "Ruyi. Please follow me."

Embarrassed, Ama followed Pierre, and Santo followed her, into the dining room. The ceiling was low and the lighting dim, but that didn't bother Ama. She can easily see the walls were painted in bright primary colors, a different color for each section. A collection of large and small sombreros, colorful woven baskets and handmade piñatas' were scattered around the room on shelves and hanging from the ceiling. This was in contrast to the unadorned tables, a simple white linen cloth spread upon them, not even a payment terminal to mar their flat surface. Nothing to get in the way of you and your meal.

The food smells delighted Ama. From what she could see in passing, TexMex is a lot of beans and rice. She liked beans and rice. The maître d' led them through the dining room to a stairway leading up onto the upper deck.

The afternoon sun greeted Ama rudely. She had not taken off her shades, but had turned them down. Now she turned them up to maximum again. They made the raw sunshine bearable, but just.

"You sure about this? Pierre can find us a table inside." Santo sounded sincere, but that didn't make it palatable.

"Don't worry it!" Ama realized how sharp that had sounded. "Is fine. Please... stop concern. I take care of me."

Santo smiled. "Of course. I meant no offense."

They walked across the patio to a table close to the edge. Selecting the chair that put the sun to Ama's back, Pierre pulled it out for her. But as she moved forward, Ama became acutely aware of the sheer drop-off just beyond the table. The floor disappeared at a hard edge bare centimeters away. Far below she can see a vast flat plain of concrete and asphalt filled with planes and ground vehicles. The people darted about like minnows in a pond. In the far distance, on the horizon, the tall buildings of the city center was visible. Ama caught her breath and abruptly stopped moving. Santo brushed against her, putting his arm around her shoulders in surprise.

"Pardon me." Seeing her discomfort and surmising its cause, Santo signaled Pierre. With a series of motions, the maître d' changed the transparency of the rail in the immediate vicinity of their table to an opaque greenish-gray color. The rail had been virtually invisible but was now as solid as a stone wall in her casa.

Ama started breathing again but remained where

she was.

Santo reached out, and touched the now visible rail. "Duraglass. It is normally a fully-transparent non-reflective colorless ceramic. Apply a current and you can align the chromium making it opaque and giving it color."

"Duraglass?" Ama had read about it, but never seen it. She suppressed her desire to back away and actually smiled while taking her seat, reflecting on how much she had to learn. But instead of feeling overwhelmed, Ama felt an intense sense of what? Relief? Liberation? Freedom? Anticipation? She was enjoying being here even when she was not. "Gracias." Ama said warmly to Pierre.

"Bienvenida." Pierre smiled and gazed into the face of this beautiful girl for a moment, then turned to Santo. "Docteur DeLeon, Mademoiselle Blunt. Enjoy your meal." He made his exit.

Santo nodded his thanks to the maître d' as he took his seat.

Ama chuckled. "If he were here, my brother would think Duraglass magic."

"Why is that funny?"

"It not funny, nonsense some people believe. What make me happy is I am here." Ama confronted her fear of heights and laid her arm on the edge of the now visible rail, gazing out on the cityscape. "I learn everything. Do everything."

"Big order."

Ama turned to him. "What is Ruyi? Person? Place? Pet name?"

Santo laughed until Ama started to get pissed. He held up his hands in surrender. "I would have bet my bottom credit you would ask me about being a doctor. Look... I'm not laughing at you, not exactly."

"You laugh at my nonsense? I guess it only fair." Ama grinned.

Santo smiled gratefully at her. "Might as well get used to it because everything will be new where you are going, totally unlike anything you faced in the burbs. Asking questions will become a way of life. My best advice... don't fight it, ask every one. Don't let anyone accuse you of asking dumb questions. No such thing."

"Is your way of calling me a dumb mugre?"

Santo's chuckle turned into a outright guffaw loud enough to attract the attention of nearby strangers. "Not no... but hell no! Last time I checked, we didn't have a choice as to when and where or to whom we are born. You're Earthborn, I'm Earthborn, so what?" He leaned forward to look Ama square in the eye. "If anything, I'm jealous. It's like finding a good book and sharing it with a friend. You know they are going to enjoy it and your anticipation for them is pure pleasure. But this is your life we are talking about. So... as your newest friend, let me tell you something important. You are

going to thoroughly enjoy where you are going. I'm not saying it will be easy, it won't be, but it will be the adventure of a lifetime. I was in Quito last year and it is truly the Center of the World. That's not just some touristy slogan. And the university is a big part of that. I still want to go. I will reapply this spring, but now I have a PhD and two years experience."

"What difference it make?"

"Different set of admission rules and people. Turns out we both may get a fresh start." Santo smiled at the girl.

"Hola Señor Santo. Are you ready to order?" Their human waiter turned out to be a rather short heavyset male well past his prime. A mustache the size of Texas engulfed his upper lip and his chin and cheeks were covered in a rough stubble. He obviously hadn't shaved for days. A huge sombrero was pushed back on his head revealing a broad forehead. What was truly strange, he wore two crossed black leather belts heavily ornamented with old style rifle cartridges in a great X across his chest. A matching black leather belt around his waist had a holster holding an ancient six shooter. Its pearl white handles gleamed in the sunlight.

The little man turned to Ama and spoke in a strange accent. "My name is Jose and I will serve you today."

Ama stared at him until she realized she was staring. She did manage not to laugh, but just barely. "Is real?" Ama pointed to the pistol and ammo belts.

Jose shook his head. "These bandoleers?" He patted the crossed belts. "Oh, no, chica. Plastic, but they look real, don't they? They would fool Pancho Villa himself." Then he pulled the pistol, rotated the cylinder first one way then the other. "This is a spice pistol. No bullets, just fresh ground sea salt and five different kinds of pepper. Nobody in their right mind would give me a real gun." Jose grinned, and slipped the spice pistol back into its holster.

Ama was having problems following his words. She was not used to Jose's accent. "Beautiful words, don't understand... fully."

Jose smiled and spoke in near perfect boonie Pidgin talk including the hand signals. "Not real. No worry."

It was at that moment Ama realized how different her own words must sound to them. Her accent was another thing she would need to work on.

"May I order for you?" Santo asked Ama.

"Ah. Sure. Do it." Ama looked over the railing at the cityscape. Preceptor Trava had worked with her on improving her Standard vocabulary and pronunciations, but she hadn't appreciated it until now. She listened carefully as Santo spoke and made up her mind. She would practice until she could speak just like him.

"For two... chili, fajita, refried beans and nachos, extra cheese. Oh, some chips and salsa. You must try the salsa here. They make four different kinds from scratch. Most excellent."

"Something to drink? We have a cerveza we brew right here?" Jose suggested to Ama.

Santo was also looking at Ama. "What about it, you want a beer?"

"Sure." Ama shrugged. "Same as you."

"Dark bock in chilled glasses." Santo replied.

"El mejor de todos... coming right up." Jose turned and walked away.

Santo waited until the server was gone. "As you wish."

"What?" Ama asked.

"Ruyi means as desired... or as one wishes... or as one likes. According to one's wishes. Following your heart's desire. Take your pick."

"Got it." Ama grinned.

"It's ancient Chinese or something." Santo chuckled again. "Love it. Here I am sharing a meal with a beautiful boonie bunny in a TexMex cafe, having been seated by a Frenchman quoting Chinese, and..." He wagged his index finger at her for emphasis. "Ordering German beer from a man in a sombrero wearing a spice pistol. Got to love Texas."

Ama didn't fully appreciate his humor, but she laughed anyway. Keeping the sun behind her, she made a quick survey of the people occupying the deck near them. At least half were wearing some version of the Lunarian visor and virtually all of these people sat alone at their tables. "More visors here than I seen in

my whole life."

Santo said nothing but he retrieved his visor from his bag and laid it on the table between them.

Ama stared at it without touching.

"This is one piece of hardware you will need to master. Essential. The university will require it." Santo pushed it towards her.

"Why you not wear?" Ama slipped back to her native Pidgin .

"You know why. People in your suburb do not treat people wearing visors very nicely. You can answer why better than I. I really don't know why you don't appreciate what visors do for you. It can't be totally about money, can it?"

"Really? How much this cost?" Ama asked. When Santo didn't answer right away, she continued. "A thousand credits? Two? More?"

Santo shrugged. "Six-five not counting the extended coverage. What's your point?"

"Six thousand five hundred credits?! More than average fisherman make in two good years. Not about money? Think again!" Ama leaned back, crossed her arms and scowled. How was she ever going to pay for something like that? And Santo is saying it is essential? Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

Santo can see it bothers her. "Don't worry about the money. The university will provide you with a visor. That's where I got this one. NDIT gives them to all

incoming freshmen and I'm sure UL does as well. Nothing fancy, but it's served me well."

Ama sighed. No, money was not the real problem.

Jose appeared with the beers. Ama picked up the visor to make room on the table. The server set the foam crowned glasses down in front of them. Jose then placed a basket in the center of the table filled to overflowing with paper-thin deep-fried corn-chips. Next came a small wire rack holding four glass bowls, each bowl containing a different colored foodstuff. "Fresh chips and salsa. Enjoy."

"Thanks Jose." Santo dipped a warm chip in the rich red salsa and popped it in his mouth with obvious pleasure.

Ama looked closely at Santo's visor, the first she had ever held. It was soft where it touched his face, and black on the inside where his eyes would gaze. The earpieces were shaped to Santo's unique ear cavity. Overall, it was a rather nondescript device. Why was the people in her village so set against it?

"They will fit yours to you and only you. The visor molds itself to your face enclosing your eyes completely, creating a perfect blindfold. Same with the audio. It fits comfortably into your ears blocking all outside sound. Yet, you will see and hear everything around you, but better because it's augmented by the very best sensors. The visor sees far better than you, hears far more than you. It greatly extends your visual

and audio perception of the world, but much more importantly, at the same time, it is the best communicator in history. It connects you to humanity, past and present, like nothing ever has. But that's not all. You like learning, you said so yourself. The visor is a learning tool like no other." Santo seemed to believe what he was saying.

"Great, but what I don't like about visor is it records everything, what I see, what I feel, and make it public. Why you want that?" Ama laid the device on the table and picked up her beer.

"The Law of Full Disclosure? I know it's hard to grasp, but it really is the only way."

"Hard to grasp? I uneducated mugre is what you say again." Ama swept her gaze over the deck. "If it connects as you say, why all those with visors sit alone?"

Santo nodded. "While that is strictly true, you fail to take into account they are actually sitting with a loved one, or a coworker, or a long dead ancestor. They are not alone. Far from it. And the fact a visor records everything and saves it for posterity is a good thing. Because of my visor, I sit and talk with my great great grandmother and explored Mars through the eyes of Trudeau. This is unique to our time thanks to this one device."

Ama shook her head, rejecting everything he had said. It felt wrong to her. Letting a mechanical device

have such control of one's present. All she had heard throughout her young life was how terrible it was to be hooked up to a visor. It wasn't human. It was something Ama was still coming to grips with, that she would be required to put one on.

Santo was disappointed. "I can see I will not convince you of the virtues of visors today, but I have no doubt you will eventually change your mind."

Ama leaned back. Is this how Markay felt when she was trying to explain the value of powersats? He simply disallowed everything she had to say outright without regard to facts. Is that what she was doing? Ama didn't want to be that way. "Might be right. Know very little of visors."

Santo nodded approvingly. "You're learning... It's not the strongest, nor the most intelligent, that survive, but the ones most able to adapt to a changing environment." When Ama looked impressed, he continued. "Charles Darwin said it centuries ago."

Jose placed a plate filled with steaming food in front of Ama then Santo. "Ready for another cerveza?" Both nodded affirmative. "Mucho Bien. I'll bring it straightaway. Enjoy your food."

Ama picked up her fork and started eating. Jose brought them beers a few minutes later. As she watched Santo eat, Ama realized she would need to improve her skill with a knife and fork. She was embarrassingly clumsy compared to him. Another

deficiency in her boonie childhood to overcome.

"Put visor on?" Ama again slipped back to Pidgin. She stopped in mid hand gesture and switched to Standard. "If you want to put your visor on, it would be fine."

Santo shook his head. "Thanks, but no. It's impolite to wear when your guest is not."

The food was delicious, unlike any found in her village, which was virtually all seafood. The TexMex spices stayed in her mouth long after she had swallowed. She listened to the sounds around her. The low murmur of voices drifted across the deck in the late afternoon sun. Even with her shades maxed out, the blue sky was blinding. Ama kept her back to the setting sun as much as possible.

"Why you know Pidgin?" Ama asked.

Santo shrugged. "No secret. Many cycles, work burbs." He spoke in his best Pidgin, but it was pathetic. "University speak Standard only. No Pidgin." His hand gestures was laughable, what one could expect from a drunk three year old. Ama was tempted to reach over the table and grab his hands to shut them up.

"Stop!" Ama laughed. "Please stop. I know Standard... sort of. I will practice, but you must practice Pidgin or promise never speak it again."

"Deal!"

The small speaker mounted under the table top come to life. "Boarding of flight seven-one-oh-two

bound for Quito, Ecuador, will begin in ten minutes."

"You did not preach on the Thoth Space Elevator." Ama was genuinely disappointed.

"You will see it for yourself soon enough." Santo walked Ama to her gate. "When you get your visor, ask Magi to find me. Remember to tell her I work for Rocky Mountain Power, Energy Engineer, Level Four."

"I will Skype you." Ama wrinkled her nose and smiled at him.

"It has truly been a pleasure meeting you Ama Blunt, Sea Woman. I will not forget you." He extended his hand.

Ama shook his hand. "I have feeling we meet again."

Santo chuckled. "I sincerely hope you're right. Until then, take care of yourself."

Ama leaned in and brushed her lips across his cheek. "Puede acariciar el mar!"

Santo grimaced and shrugged. He didn't understand.

"Is old saying in my village. What friends say when part." Ama cocked her head, wrinkled her nose and smiled. "Is good luck... but better."

"Better? Better-than-good luck to you as well Ama."

Ama walked away, turning once to look back. Santo was still there, only now he was wearing his

visor. She paused, gave him a little wave which he returned, then resumed walking down the long tunnel to the plane. The adventure of her life? She could handle that. Ama smiled.