

# Lost in Translation



Hazel Osborne

**Volume 2, Chapters 8 – 14**

## Chapter 8

I dug through my bag and grabbed my only weapon, a small solar powered pistol. It was built more for shooting targets than for fighting, much like myself. I stood against the ship and watched for the source of the noise. I could see movement now, in the brambles. I was painfully aware of how bright my ship was, a shiny metal hunk in a clearing the size of an Olympic pool. I could have run, but if the thing coming towards me was intelligent enough to know it was looking at a crashed ship, I would only be delaying the inevitable. Besides, what did I have to run to?

I didn't immediately notice her when she came around a tree. She was roughly the color of the forest she'd come from.

She looked like a velociraptor, slightly taller than me and with feathers around her head like a crown. She wore clothing which was little more than rags draped across her body with holes for her arms and head. She had a satchel, in which she seemed to be carrying plants and fruits. She stopped as soon as she saw me, as did her song. She looked at me sideways with only one eye. She was forty feet away.

We stared at each other for a minute, neither moving. The feathers on the back of her head seemed to twitch, but it might have just been the wind. Or my imagination. I tried to picture my textbooks, lightyears away, which had shown pictures of various intelligent species and how to communicate with them. The one standing before me was entirely unfamiliar.

With nothing else to try, I started to repeat the tune she'd been singing, to the best of my memory.

She took a few steps towards me, and I paused after only a few notes. After a second of silence, she finished the stanza. I repeated her line, then added my own, similar to hers but different. This continued back and forth a few more times, each new stanza marked by a few more steps in my direction.

She stopped a few yards away, then craned her neck to get a good look at the ship behind me. She noticed my injured arm, then sniffed the air.

I gulped, wondering if she was deciding where I was on the food chain. I was fairly confident I had proved I was intelligent and able to communicate, but that wouldn't necessarily rule me out as a meal.

A moment later she'd taken one of her claws and ripped a small strip of fabric off the edge of her clothing. Now that she was closer it was clear that this was done often, judging by the ragged edge of the cloth. Perhaps it was less of a covering and more of a way to carry a large sheet of material. She handed me the fabric, with a pointed look towards my bloody arm. I hesitated a moment. Then I took it.

"Thank you," I said, even though she couldn't understand me. I wrapped the fabric around my injury, keeping her in the corner of my eye as I did so.

"Ghara." I looked up, startled. She repeated it, and I watched her mouth move this time so there was no doubt that she was the one speaking. "Ghara."

I frowned. This could have been 'you're welcome,' or 'get lost stranger,' or literally anything else.

"Ghara," she said, more slowly this time, like she was talking to a child. A particularly dumb child. I looked her up and down. She held one claw up to her chest, upturned like she was holding a tray. Then she held it out to me. I was supposed to respond.

"Marie?" I said it like a question, and pointed to myself. She tilted her head like a dog. I changed my gesture so I was holding my palm up like she was. "Maire."

She wagged her tail like a dog and held her claw out to me. "Arie!" Then back to herself. "Ghara!"

"Ghara!" I repeated. We had names and we had pointing - it wasn't a bad start. She dug around in her satchel and pulled out two fruits that looked roughly like pears. She handed one to me and began eating the other.

I stared at it. Obviously it was safe for her to eat it. I had no way of knowing what it would do to me, but I wasn't going to be able to live off the beef jerky and dried fruit in my bag for very long. I took a bite. It was a bit bitter, but not terrible. I waited a moment before taking another. Nothing was swelling and I wasn't hallucinating. I ate about half the fruit before she started walking away, motioning for me to follow and saying a word I took to mean 'let's go.' I took my duffel bag and followed her.

The forest was thick with dried branches and bushes, spilling across all the space in between the trees. Thankfully, walking behind Ghara was as easy as walking through the clearing. She stomped down all obstacles, if they weren't stomped down already. I pointed to objects as we went, and she supplied their names in her language. I repeated them in my head as we went, wishing I could will all other foreign words out of my head to make room for them. It was unlikely that my knowledge of Spanish and Latin would come in use here.

Ghara stopped, and I nearly stepped on her tail. Looking past her we had reached another clearing, this one filled with a couple of small huts and what almost looked like a chicken coup, housing small animals that almost looked like chickens.

She made a noise, one low whistle. Then, out of one of the huts, came three creatures that looked like Ghara, but much smaller. Her children.

She said a few things to them, then pointed to me and said my name. The kids barely glanced at me, much more concerned with whatever they were trying to explain to their mother. After a moment, so was she. She made a few clicking sounds, shook her head like a distressed horse, then took off past the huts and down the hill. Her children followed her, and I followed them.

We arrived at a well, which she promptly started yelling down. A few moments later, a small voice replied. She turned around briefly to yell at her kids, then looked down at the well again. Once she had calmed down a bit I glanced down it myself. Sure enough, there was a fourth child sitting at the bottom of the well, covered in mud. A rope had already been lowered down, but the kid seemed stuck in the mud and couldn't quite reach it. The mother, as far as I could tell, was trying to shout instructions, and was not making much progress.

I stepped away from the group and started looking through my bag. I had a rope, a nicer and stronger one than the one they had, by the looks of it. Fully aware of my own selfish ambition to get accepted by this dinosaur family as helpful, rather than as food, I began to tie one end to a thick tree.

I watched realization hit Ghara as I walked up to the well, rope in hand. She started to gesture me away. "I'm helping. Help." I repeated it slower and pointed down the well, then pulled on the rope to demonstrate that it was securely tied. She hesitated, glanced back down at her kid, then stepped away. I swung the rope down and started making my way down the well.

The kid changed from afraid to confused rather quickly. "Marie," I said, pointing to myself with the palm of my hand.

"Taru," said the kid. I nodded and hoped it was his name.

I tied a loop at the bottom of the rope that was already down there, then helped him up so he could stand on it, careful not to get my own hands slick in the mud or my feet stuck. There were rims of brick along the sides of the well, just uneven enough that I had foot and hand holds. "*Let's go!*" I said, in their language. At least, that's what I intended to say.

Ghara started to raise up the rope with the child now standing on it, and I started to climb the other.

Taru all but collapsed once he reached the top. She looked her kid over then, once determining that he wasn't seriously hurt, started scolding all four of them. I untied my rope, keeping myself busy until she was finished.

"*Arie, let's go.*" I turned back around to find that her kids had taken off back towards the huts. She said something else to me, and put on claw on my shoulder. I took that to mean "thank you" or, at the very least, "I guess we won't eat you".

Back in her clearing, she led me into one of the huts. I recognized right away what was her nest, a large indent in the ground filled with cloth. She took one piece out, the size of a small blanket, then pointed to a large bench with a cushion across it. She repeated my name and another word I didn't know yet, but I got the meaning. She was going to let me crash on her couch. "Thank you," I said, in English. Then I tried the phrase I'd heard her say earlier, and hoped it meant "thank you" in her language.

## Chapter 9

The benefit of living with a creature with four small children was that I quickly picked up the words for 'why', 'how', and 'what'. From there I began to pick up more words and phrases. Taru in particular, the boy I had helped out of the well, had made it his personal mission to teach me his language. Or he was using me as an excuse to get out of doing chores. Either way, I was grateful.

Most of the time I helped Ghara and her kids with the daily tasks. I helped to feed the chicken-like animals, I went with them into the forest to gather herbs and fruit. I couldn't carry much, but I could do something they couldn't — climb trees.

"*Tree! Tree!*" said Taru, leading me along by the hand to a tree that had red fruits shaped like bananas hanging from it.

"*You want me to climb this?*" He nodded. While they taught me their language, they also picked up on some of mine - mainly nodding and shaking their heads for 'yes' and 'no'.

"*Okay. Help me.*" He locked his hands together, and I used them to boost myself up to the lowest branch. A few moments later I was sitting ten feet above him. "*Okay?*"

"*Okay!*" I took out my knife and begun cutting off the fruit. Taru caught them in a large basket as they fell. "*That's -----!*"

I frowned. "*What is it?*"

"-----"

"*I don't know that word.*" He began jumping up and down and waving his arms, saying more words I didn't know.

"*Taru...*" Then I heard the squawking behind me.

I turned around to see an animal resembling a bird diving towards my head. I swung down from the branch I was on, crashed to the forest ground, and scrambled backwards. The bird-like creature landed on the branch I'd been sitting on a second earlier and peered down at the two of us. I looked like a parrot, but it had large, bulbous eyes, like that of a housefly.

"*Taru, what is that?*"

"*I told you.*" He repeated the word he'd said before.

"*Can you say danger? I know that word.*" He tilted his head, confused.

"*It's not ---- danger. It lives in these trees.*" I tried to think of a way to explain it in his language, but I couldn't. I made a mental note to just duck and run whenever he started shouting something I didn't understand.

"*Okay, Taru. Let's go home.*"

Dinner that evening consisted of the fruit Taru and I had gathered, and a few eggs and root vegetables. I'd found that I could eat most of what Ghara's family ate, save for a few herbs that were far too bitter and strong and left me coughing. We sat around the fire that Ghara had used to cook everything. The family talked and I listened. They spoke faster to each other than they did to me, and I had trouble following the conversation. Taru had made it his job to try and keep me in the loop, with varying degrees of success.

"*Ghara says she saw a ---- at ----. We have to ----- ----- ---- eggs.*"

I nodded. "*Thanks, Taru.*" He was doing his best.

After we'd finished eating, Ghara turned to me. "*Do you want to go to your cart?*"

The best way I'd found to explain my ship was to compare it to the large wheelbarrow like contraption that was parked behind Ghara's home. I'd returned to that ship, that crash site, every evening since I'd landed. There was nothing there I needed; I'd taken my duffel bag with me when I'd left originally. I had no way of fixing it. Every evening I stared at the engine anyway, in hopes that the answer would simply come to me. As if I could learn engineering by staring at a spaceship for long enough. This was probably impossible, but I certainly had plenty of time to keep trying.

The main reason I went to the crash site every evening was just in case the emergency distress signal had been found by someone — someone with a ship of their own. That's what I told myself.

I had no way of explaining this to Ghara, and she didn't ask. She just went with me. The kids always went too, spending half of the time gaping at the shiny metal object that displayed their reflection and the other half of the time tackling each other in the clearing.

I followed Ghara to where she'd first found me. We pushed our way through the green plants, the green brush, and the green trees, and if I looked up at the blue sky I could pretend for a moment that I was on Earth, perhaps for a holiday or a school trip. I'd spent a lot of my days pretending I was on Earth. Today I could pretend for another hour or so. Once the sun started to set the illusion would be much more

difficult — at sunset the sky turned the wrong color. Already a cruel shade of green was creeping into the horizon.

One of Ghara's children ran ahead and grabbed a handful of wildflowers. She handed one to me, and I put it behind my ear. She stared at me for a moment, then tried to balance one of the flowers on her head. She paused as I tucked it around one of the feathers on her head, and I forgot about the green sky for half a minute.

When we got to the ship I walked around it twice, checking for anything different — footprints, a note, a blinking light. There was nothing.

"*Where's your home?*" asked Ghara.

I pointed to the sky.

"*How?*"

I struggled to think of a way to explain it. "*The cart goes in the sky. The cart is broken now.*"

Ghara shook her head. "*No... how is home?*" She spoke slowly, "*Your home is like... what? Your mother is like what?*"

"Oh." I sat down next to the ship, and Ghara sat with me.

"*My home is...*" I probably sat in silence for a full minute. "*I don't know the words.*"

"*I'm sorry.*"

A moment later, two scaly shapes crashed into the other side of the ship, making loud ringing sounds. Ghara shouted something at her children, who apologized and hurried off in the other direction.

I tapped the side of my ship, recreating the ringing sound, albeit at a lower volume. The metal, bent and twisted from the crash landing, created different notes depending on where I tapped. I looked at Ghara.

"*This is what my home is like:*

And the old wives tale says,

Moon rocks would tell you if they could.

Watch the sky, and I will try,

to help you home, to warmth and food."



The second verse had the same melody, and Ghara hummed it with me this time. I still could not remember the third, but by the time I got there, Taru had joined us and was adding his own words, so the song sounded complete anyway.

When the sky began to turn dark, we headed for home. "*We are going tomorrow,*" said Ghara.

"*What?*"

"*We are going to ----.*" I shook my head.

"*What is ----?*"

"*---- is ...*" She thought for a moment. "*---- has many homes and many people.*"

A town, I thought. Tomorrow we will go into town.

## Chapter 10

I was the first to wake up the next morning - quite a feat considering that this family rose with the sun and not a moment later. Unable to fall back asleep I sat at the entrance of Ghara's home and watched the sky turn from dark to a murky green. Then, once everyone else had begun to stir, I got up and started to build a fire to cook breakfast.

I had been here for weeks now, and although I had seen many animals, Ghara and her family were the only intelligent beings I had met. The thought of going into town - of there being a town - brought to the forefront the hope I'd been trying not to feed: What if there were beings nearby that had developed space travel?

It was possible that Ghara and her family were not the dominant species on this planet. It was possible that there were space travelers on a nearby planet, who visited this one.

Of course, there was still the trouble of getting across the galaxy. A ship that could get me from this rock to the one orbiting it was all well and good, but to get home I'd need more than that. I'd need a portal, a wormhole. I had no idea where I even was in relation to my solar system. But despite this, the thought of being just one step closer to home, even if it was nothing compared to the lightyears long journey I was faced with, filled my brain to the point that I probably shouldn't have been put in charge of cooking breakfast, for fear I'd set my own clothing on fire.

I did not, thankfully, set my own clothing on fire that morning. Or anyone else's, for that matter.

"*When do we go to town?*" I asked Ghara.

"*You are like my children.*" She shook her head. "*They say the same thing. We go when the cart is -----.*"

As soon as we finished eating, we began to prepare the wagon. The kids rushed around, clearly excited. I think I moved at the same pace as I normally would have. It was hard to tell. I watched my hands move as if they didn't quite belong to me. They shook.

Ghara pulled the cart. The kids and I did some pushing, some navigating around particularly rough patches, but otherwise the five of us were fairly unhelpful. Before long we came across a worn path, which quickly shifted to gravel, and our pace quickened.

The road curved often, and my breath caught at every turn as I waited to see another person just around the bend.

Finally it happened. There was a creature similar to Ghara walking in the opposite direction. He had a large basket strapped to his back and a series of plates across his head and neck, resembling either a stegosaurus or a loaded dishwasher. He nodded at Ghara, then at me, then did a double take. He said something I didn't understand, looking at me but not speaking to me. Ghara responded, with a quick glance back at me, then continued past him. He seemed to shrug, and didn't say any more.

I became aware of the fact that while Ghara and her family may have come to the conclusion that I was not food, no one else on this planet had made a judgement on that matter yet.

I turned to Taru. "*Tell me more words. Words used in towns.*" He taught me things until we arrived at the town. I tried to remember more than half of it.

We passed over a hill and there it was. Dozen of buildings, a main road, lots of carts and people moving them. There were no automobiles or engines as far as I could see. I let out a long breath, and decided I would process that later.

The main road was dotted with people. Many looked like Ghara and her family. A few of them were flanked by creatures that I could only assume were livestock - animals on four legs with hooves and saddles. There were a few people that looked nothing like Ghara. A pair of dark blue humanoid figures sat outside of a small building, with large antler-like growths coming from the tops of their bald heads.

Then I spotted what appeared to be a blonde human about my age just a few yards away.

We were already heading in his direction. I stared at the back of his head. No one here looked like any extraterrestrial I'd ever seen in a book; If Earth was aware of this planet, something here would have been familiar. I knew this, and I knew it was nearly impossible that another human had ended up out here by mistake. It was the word 'nearly' that had woken me up before dawn this morning.

He turned around as we passed, and was clearly inhuman. He was so close, and I was sure my face showed my disappointment. His eyes were all dark, like that of a dog. He had quite an underbite, with large fangs protruding from his lower jaw, more like tusks than teeth. I stared at his face a moment too long, as if I was just seeing it in the wrong light and any moment now it would shift into a human face. It didn't.

Ghara set her cart up next to his and began setting out the things we had brought. Before long people were coming up to us and offering money and items in exchange for what we had. The kids sat nearby and I sat with them. There wasn't much we could do to help.

After a few moments of sitting and watching customers, the blonde alien came over to me and said something in a language I didn't understand. It wasn't Ghara's language. I blinked. "Sorry?" He switched to Ghara's language and I felt relieved, until I realized I still couldn't understand. He was talking way too fast. I turned to Taru for help.

"He said 'Where are you ----?'"

I nodded. "I'm Marie. I..." I pointed towards the sky. "My home is far. Very Far. I can't go home now. It's too far."

"I'm Bahr." He spoke much slower this time. "Are you a ----?"

"I don't know ----." I tried to repeat the word he'd used, but it sounded odd, like it didn't quite belong to the language we were speaking. He understood that I didn't understand.

He thought for a moment. "Have you seen the ----?" I turned to Taru.

"He said the place with all the ----.... all the ----. Very ----."

"Taru, what is ----?"

"---- is a place with lots of ----. The things with all the words."

Ghara turned around, having heard part of the conversation. She and Bahr spoke in his language, then she turned to me. "Go with Bahr to ----. ---- can help."

I nodded and followed Bahr into the center of town. He took me to one of the larger buildings. It was one of the few here that was two stories tall. There was a sign across the front with symbols I couldn't read. He opened the door for me and I stepped inside. I let out a small gasp when I realized what I was standing in.

Shelves of books and paper split the room into long slivers. There were signs posted on each shelf, with little arrows under the words. We were in a library.

"Things with words. Books."

"Books, and also ----." Bahr led me upstairs. The second floor had fewer shelves. There was a large table in the center of the room and cabinets across two of the walls. The other walls were covered in paintings and drawings. I went to the table first. Spread across the entire slab of wood was a solar system chart. One planet was drawn larger than the rest, with continents labeled in a language I couldn't read.

"Where are you ---- ? Where is home? Are you from ----?" He pointed to the moon around the labelled planet. "The ---- come from here often. Did you ---- your people?"

I stared down at the dots and lines and labels. It was beautiful. It was entirely useless to me. I had the strange desire to start laughing. Even if Earth was on this map, I wouldn't be able to find it. I had no idea how to read their maps, their languages.

"My home is Earth. Earth isn't on this. How far do these other people go?" I pointed to the moon.

He shook his head. "This is everything. No one goes further than this. I'm sorry." I nodded. Someone nearby had developed space travel, but only enough to move through this solar system.

"Thank you." I replied. He had tried. It had been a good idea, to come here.

He tilted his head and said something I didn't understand. I wasn't listening anyway. I'd noticed one of the drawing behind him. I ran around the table and towards it.

It was a portrait of a man in a uniform, military by the looks of it. A human man. "Who is this?"

"I don't know." Bahr looked very confused.

"He's..." I looked back and the drawing. It was clearly a drawing of a human, but one different from me in every way. The man in the drawing had a dark complexion and a grey beard and no hair at the top of his head. I was pale, young, and had long black hair. It wasn't surprising that Bahr, who had never seen a human before today, wasn't making the connection. "He's like me. I'm like him. He... Earth..."

Bahr nodded slowly. "Okay." Then he walked back down the stairs. I stared around at the other drawings. There were many creatures, but no other humans. There were many inscriptions, but no human languages.

For a brief moment, I wanted to take a picture of the drawing, before I remembered that the only technology I had available to me at the moment was a gun and a water filter.

I sat down in front of the drawing like I was about to pray to it. "How did you get here?"

A moment later Bahr returned, and I didn't notice until he put his hand on my shoulder.

"I talked to the ----. She says that he is ----. Come with me."

"He's here?" I followed Bahr outside, feeling as though I was going to fall forward onto my face with every step. We walked to another building, then around that building to an open field. The field was littered with stones, some in piles, some standing by themselves.

We stopped in the middle of the field. Bahr knelt down in front of one of the stones, and I all but fell down next to him. I read the inscription through blurry eyes. It wasn't in English, but I understood enough. My knowledge of Latin languages had come in use here after all.

"Descanse em paz. Henrique de Matos."

## Chapter 11

Bahr said something I didn't understand. I thought it might have been a question, and if it was he received no answer. I sat in front of the stone for what felt like few minutes, and then he helped me to my feet.

For a fleeting moment I wanted to put my mouth on that stone, not to kiss it but to bite it. It didn't seem real enough. None of this seemed real enough. Maybe if I broke a tooth on it, it would become so.

"*I'm sorry,*" he said.

"*Thank you. But... I did not know this person.*"

"*Were they ---- Earth?*"

"*Yes. I know these words.*" I reached down and ran a finger along the inscription. Portuguese, if I wasn't mistaken. All I knew for sure is that they were the alphabet I recognized, and only a human would be buried under them.

"*Are you okay?*" I nodded, still staring down at the letters. "*Come with me. ---- may help with ---- ----. There's a ----.*" I followed him out of the cemetery. He'd been helpful so far, as helpful as he could have been, and I had nothing better to do.

We went to see Ghara first. Bahr explained something to her, too quickly for me to follow. She seemed sad as he explained, I assumed, our trip to the cemetery. Then she perked up as he finished speaking.

"*Go ----. Arie, ---- ----.*" I nodded along to a command I couldn't understand and let Bahr lead me to the other side of the town.

I heard our destination before I saw it. There were a dozen or so small drums being played by hand. Next I heard their companions, soft bells and flutes. We rounded the corner into a clearing dressed in banners and colored chinks. A festival. The crowd was almost entirely made up of people who looked like Bahr, large tusk like teeth and black eyes on otherwise human looking faces.

We sat down on a log on the outside of the clearing, with dozens of others, and watched those in the center. There were a few couples there, jumping to the music over a large rope being swung by a particularly tall pair of individuals. For a moment I was back in elementary school, on the playground with a jump rope. Bahr said something I didn't understand, and I smiled and nodded at him. This was hardly an answer to my problems, but it was a welcome distraction from them.

A few minutes later Bahr was pulled away from me by what I assumed were his friends. The scene was quite familiar even though I understood none of it - the joking around, the enthusiasm. At one point one of them said something that made the rest of the group pretend to be terribly offended, all but smacking the grinning offender.

The scene almost made me sadder than the cemetery had. When Bahr glanced back at me, I avoided eye contact. Whatever this was, it was a joyous occasion. I could keep my melancholy to myself — I owed Bahr that much at least, for his kindness.

The couples switched off at seemingly random intervals, perhaps when they got tired, only to be replaced by another pair. Bahr made his way back to me, and I tried to think of the words to tell him he didn't have to keep me company if he had plans with friends.

"*Arie* ---- ----?" The question was accompanied by a hand gesture I didn't recognize. Then he held his hand out like he was waiting for a handshake. I took it.

He just stood there for a moment, blinking at me. One of the drummers shouted something I didn't understand. Bahr glanced at him, smiled at me, still looking a bit bewildered, then led me toward the clearing. Don't trip, I told myself as we went over the rope. Don't trip.

I didn't trip. My days on the school playground had trained me well.

I noticed, once I had gotten into the rhythm of jump rope, that he kept glancing around at the crowd while we jumped together. "*Are you okay?*" I whispered, not sure how else to ask it.

"*Yes,*" he replied, then paused and let out what sounded like a small laugh. It sounded almost like a human laugh, but not quite, and I suddenly became very worried. He looked so much like a human that I kept forgetting that he wasn't, a fact I needed to remember but had no incentive to believe.

The music ended not long after Bahr and I had left the clearing. An older person of Bahr's species came over to us, said something loudly that I didn't understand, and took out a wooden ring. It was painted yellow, was about ten inches across, and had a few yellow feathers hanging from it. He passed it to Bahr, who then held it over my head.

I stared Bahr in the eyes, trying to ask a question non verbally. If the question was received, he didn't show it. He lowered the ring onto my head like a crown. "*Arie! ----! ----!*"

Long live the Queen, I thought to myself.



When Ghara saw us return, she all but freaked out, and started rambling to Bahr. Taru started chanting something. None of this helped me understand what had happened. Bahr seemed embarrassed by all the attention. I turned to Taru for help after his enthusiasm had died down a bit.

"*What does this mean?*"

"*You're a ---- now.*"

"*A what?*"

"*A ----. Like Bahr. You will ---- --- ---- ---- home will be ---- him.*"

I turned to Ghara. "*I'm sorry... I don't...*"

Ghara waved away my half baked sentence. "*This is good! We'll get your ---- and ---- and ---- ----. And you will go with Bahr.*"

"*Where?*"

Bahr cut into the conversation. "*I talked to ---- about the man in the library. ---- you want to go to ----. There may be more.*"

"*More? More like me?*" I whispered.

"*Maybe. I'll help you look.*"

"*Thank you, thank you.*" I repeated it about a dozen more times.

Ghara began speaking to Bahr, or rather, she began talking at him as he nodded every minute or so. Her stream of words did nothing to slow down her work of packing up the cart. Bahr and I tried to help, but between Ghara being distracted and her children swinging wildly between helping, tackling each other, and shouting, I think she did it all herself.

Bahr walked back home with us. I wanted to tell him he didn't have to, that I could just find him in town the next day, but I didn't have the words for it. I got the feeling he wouldn't have listened anyway.

My duffel bag with all of my possessions was sitting in Ghara's house. "*My... cart...*" I tried to think of an excuse to visit the ship again, possibly for the last time. There was nothing in there I needed.

"*We'll go see your cart,*" Ghara declared. "*Bahr, let's go -----. It's Arie's -----. ----.*"

"*You don't have to go,*" I told him. He shook his head.

"*I want to.*" Ghara led the way through the brambles and forest, Bahr and I following behind.

There was barely a breeze. I thought that the ship had shifted in the mud slightly, in the days since the crash, like it was burying its head under the dirt like a burrowing animal. The ship looked like it was sleeping, though of course it couldn't and never had. I opened the door, and it gave the smallest of creaks in protest.

Bahr seemed entirely unsure about it. "*That's a cart? There's no ----.*"

"*It flew.*" I pointed to the sky. "*My home is there*"

He nodded, slowly. "*I've seen flying ----. From the other ----. Those are much larger.*"

I shrugged. "*This cart is just for me.*"

He frowned. "*Why? Where were you going?*"

I opened my mouth, then closed it as I tried to think of the words. "*There was danger at home.*"

"*I'm sorry.*"

"*Thank you,*" I muttered. Not sure what else to say, I leaned into the ship.

There was nothing else in it. I checked in the compartments, just in case something else had been left behind. There was registration and insurance information - useless. There was a small pocket knife; this I took. There were a few pens. I took these as well, and used the back of one of the insurance papers to write a message.

"This ship belonged to Marie Dumont, of the Southern Lunar Colonies. I crashed her in June, in the 345th year of the Lunar Project. I have spent time with a family of creatures that resemble velociraptors, who have been very kind to me. The food they've given me has all been safe for me to eat. I have been helped by an alien that looks almost human, but with tusks like a boar and eyes like a dog. The people here do not seem to have invented space travel yet themselves, but they are not unfamiliar with it. I have found the grave of another human, with an inscription in a Latin language. I have been told that there may be more humans here, and I am going to search for them."

I turned to Bahr and Ghara, who were waiting outside patiently for me to finish. The sky had begun to turn its sunset green. "*Where are the others like me? Where will we go?*"

Bahr said a word, then, when I gave him a blank stare in response, he pointed northward. To the mountains. I nodded, and continued to write.

"I am going with one of the aliens here, named Bahr, northwards to the mountains. There may be other humans there."

## Chapter 12

Bahr and I left Ghara's home the next morning. I was surprised, and happily so, to find farewell hugs to be a universal gesture. We left with as many fruits and root vegetables as the two of us could reasonably carry. I had my duffel bag. Bahr had a bag that he wore like a backpack. I still had the yellow ring on my head; It had seemed important to Bahr's people, and he'd said nothing about removing it yet. I figured if it made me look like less of a stranger, like less of an alien, I'd wear it until someone told me I supposed to take it off.

The journey began quietly, but before long I had to fill the time and silence with something, even if we could barely understand each other. "*Your words... they are different from Ghara's.*"

"*Yes, we speak different ---. I know her --- --- and I ---- ---- ----.*"

"*Teach me yours. Please.*" He started to translate, from Ghara's language to his own, a handful of common words. The two languages were similar, and I found his language easier to pronounce. The grammar was a bit different, however, and he kept correcting my word order. I was still trying to puzzle out the pattern in his corrections when we arrived in town.

We'd barely made in ten feet past the first building before a woman of Ghara's species rushed towards us. She said something quickly to Bahr, then handed him a few sheets of paper.

Bahr looked at me. "*From the library,*" he explained. He passed the papers to me.

Most of it was in Portuguese, which I would have to comb through later. There was a small section in English, written in a cursive script that was slightly cumbersome to read.

"I have tried to communicate with the natives about my visions — I know so little of their language that the effort has been all but futile. My goal remains the same, to enter the mountain that was shown to me in my dreams. Discussions with the natives about the mountain have been difficult, beyond just the language barrier. I believe it holds religious significance to them.

They keep telling me about a creature or person in the jungle near the mountain's base, a being associated with wisdom. I've decided to go to the jungle first before addressing the mountain, due in no small part to the insistence of the natives (if I am understanding them correctly, that is). If the teacher there that they hold in such high regard cannot give me a good reason to not go into the heart of the mountain, then into the mountain I shall go."

"Thank you," I said to the librarian, as I continued to stare at the paper.

Bahr waited a moment before speaking again. "*I have to see the ---- -----. My people have a ---- ---- ---- before we leave.*" I folded the paper, carefully, into my duffel bag, thanked the librarian twice more, then followed Bahr to the other side of town.

Yesterday's festivities were nowhere to be seen, but Bahr's people were still out and about. A few of them had tables with things for sale. A few were just sitting around. Some kids played in an open section between two buildings, occupied with a game that seemed oddly similar to hop scotch.

Bahr went straight to an older man wearing a dozen or so beaded necklaces. He looked like leadership, and had the posture to match. Bahr started talking to him, presumably about our journey. I caught only a couple of words, enough to be proud of myself for learning them so quickly, but not enough to understand anything. After Bahr had said his piece he knelt down on one knee. The older man began to chant. He took off one of his necklaces and waved it over Bahr.

I tried to read their expressions. I couldn't. It looked like a ceremony, perhaps a religious one - if they were human I would have assumed as much. But they weren't human, no matter how comforting it might have been to pretend they were. I double checked that the papers I'd just received were still in my bag, running a finger over the English script once before sealing it away again behind a layer of protective, waterproof fabric.

A moment later Bahr rose to his feet. Whatever had just happened was now finished. Some of the others nearby gave Bahr some more supplies including, to my relief, a small tent. We went through our inventory one last time, passing some of his latest gifts to me to divide the load. Then we were off.

"*Who was that? The man with the...*" I shook one hand to mimic the man with the beaded necklaces, hoping I wasn't disrespecting a sacred religious act.

"*That was ----. He is the ---- who ---- ---- ----.*"

"*I... I don't know those words. Sorry.*" Bahr nodded, then thought for a moment.

"*I don't know how to say it with words you know.*"

"*Okay.*" This was going to be a long journey, possibly in more ways than one. "*How long will we be walking? How much walking?*"

"*I don't know. Maybe ----?*"

I shook my head. Taru had tried to teach me numbers, but we hadn't gotten very far with that. I'd come to the conclusion that however they counted here, it wasn't with base ten. "*We will walk today. Then we will find the ---- tomorrow. They go faster.*"

"*Is that like a cart?*" I hadn't even considered the possibility of public transportation, given how small the town had been and how rural everything seemed to be.

"*Bigger,*" Bahr replied. He offered no further explanation. I spent a bit of time trying to picture what a large city might look like on the planet, given the level of technology I had seen so far.

The path disappeared soon after we left the town. Bahr lead the way through the woods towards a small stream, and then used that as our guide. We spoke little, but the walk was far from quiet. The hum of insects shifted from barely noticeable to oppressive as our path sloped downwards and we got further and further from the small part of this planet that had become familiar to me. Sounds like bird calls punched through the hum every few minutes, though I could see none through the thick canopy of trees above. The stream beside us was silent and gentle, for the first two hours of our journey.

Bahr noticed the change before I did and stopped abruptly. I almost ran into his back. He hushed me with a wave of his hand, his eyes fixed on a ripple in the water. He drew out a dagger. I took out my handgun and checked that the solar battery was still functioning, still charged. Not that I hadn't already checked it that morning. And the morning before that.

The stream rippled again, and a scaled head broke the surface of the water. It looked like a cobra, hood extended, until it rose tall enough that I could see its shoulders. The creature was shaped like a snake but with two long, spindly arms to carry it. Bahr locked eyes with the thing and held up his knife.

I fired my gun. The thing shrieked, writhing in the water. I shot again and it fell quiet. It landed in a shallow part of the creek, just shallow enough that the thing did not fall completely out of view and under the water. It was smoking slightly where I had shot it, just below the jaw. I smiled to myself, dryly. Not a bad shot, considering my lack of practice.

I glanced up at Bahr. A look flashed across his face, one he'd likely already seen me give him. A look of realization, that we didn't really know each other.

I put the gun away. I briefly considered showing him my empty hands, then decided against it. We had to keep seeing each other as equal partners in this.

We stopped for the night when the sun had started to set. We made out camp by the creek. I tried to wash my hair with the running water and a pinch of the soap I had in my duffel bag. I'd been able to

bathe a couple of times while living with Ghara, but washing my clothes had proved quite difficult, not to mention I did not have much soap to spare and only one extra set of clothing. So I spread out the task as long as I could stand it. Washing my hair didn't do much to make me any cleaner, but it at least gave me the impression that I was doing something about my appearance and smell.

The tent was barely big enough for the two of us and our bags, which we stacked between us, both to divide our space and because there was literally no other place to put them. I wondered, briefly, if it was strange in his culture to share a tent with a woman he barely knew. He didn't bring it up, so neither did I. Either it wasn't strange to him, or like me he was just too dead tired to worry about it. I fell asleep as soon as I had lain down.

## Chapter 13

We both woke up with the sunrise, ate some food, and got to work taking down the tent with barely a word spoken between us. Bahr took the lead again, sticking close to the stream while I stuck close behind him. The trees had become more dense here, due in part, I assumed, to the fact that there was little traffic out here to trample down the undergrowth. I had nothing to do for the next hour but listen to the hum of the insects and wonder what they looked like. The thing in the creek had been large and obviously dangerous, but I found it hard to believe Earth was the only planet that produced venomous insects and poisonous plants. I was certain Bahr would warn me if he saw something, but that was hardly a guarantee of safety. Things that were safe to Bahr could easily be deadly to me.

The trees began to thin as the ground began to incline, and before long I saw something glinting through the vegetation.

*"What is that?"*

*"It's the ----. The ---- will bring us to the ----."*

As we got closer it became clear that the light was reflecting off a large sheet of metal. The hull of a ship. *"Does this go to the moon?"* I asked Bahr.

*"I don't know. The people with ships go to the moon. I don't know the --- ---- ---- ships."*

There were a handful of people at the base of the ship. They were of a species I'd seen in town, humanoids with dark blue skin and short antlers. They had no hair on their heads, or perhaps they all shaved it. Their clothing was simple, but the material shone slightly, like it was made of silk.

Bahr walked straight up to one who was holding a notebook, made a gesture, then handed him a couple of coins and pointed towards me. *"I don't have..."* I didn't know the word for money. Bahr waved away the half comment.

*"I ---- for us both."*

*"Thank you."* I made a mental note that I'd pay him back, should the opportunity arise - although I didn't see how it would.

We were guided by another figure into the ship's cargo area. There were shallow padded seats along the wall, in between stacks of crates. The guide left us there, then went to join more like him near the front of the cargo area. They seemed to speak only with sign language.



"*Can they...*" I tugged on my ear as I whispered to Bahr.

"*Yes. But they cannot talk.*"

"*Do you know their words?*"

"*Some,*" Bahr replied, frowning slightly.

"*I know it.*" I jumped and turned around. There was a woman walking towards us of the same species as Bahr. Her hair was darker than his and she had streaks of green paint across one side of her face. She did a double take when she saw my face, then glanced at the ring on my head.

"*You two are ----?*"

"*Yes,*" said Bahr. "*We are heading north.*"

"*I'm Jinny.*"

"*Bahr.*"

"*Marie.*"

"*Tree, roots.*" I frowned, assuming I had misheard her. I turned to Bahr, who shrugged.

"*I don't know,*" he said.

"*You don't know these words?*" He gave me an odd look.

"*She's from ----. It's a very different ----.*"

Jinny repeated his words, with an exaggerated pronunciation and a smile. "*I'm from ----,*" she explained. I heard it this time, her accent.

Jinny sat down next to me. "*You've got ----- -----. Where are you from?*"

"*Very far.*" I glanced around the space we were in. There were dozens of boxes but it was far from full. There were a handful of the people with antlers walking in and out, some with clipboards and some with boxes. Labels and memos were taped to any available surface along the walls. One large piece of paper on the far wall looked familiar.

"*Bahr, is that the thing that was in the library? The thing with the stars and the words?*"

"*I think so.*" I took a deep breath, trying not to get too hopeful.

"Jinny, you can talk to them?" She'd barely finished saying yes when I grabbed her hand and led her to the other side of the cargo bay. A member of the crew was next to us in an instant.

"How far have you gone before?" I asked him, through Jinny. He seemed to be glaring at me - it was difficult to tell. Up close I realized that this species had no eyebrows, and their eyes were completely dark blue like their complexion. There was not much on their faces to signal expression, not to my human eyes. A second later he answered the question.

"He was ---- ----- the far side of the moon."

"How far has anyone gone?" I asked, fully aware of my poor grammar. "What's the most far?" Jinny and the man signed a few things back and forth. Bahr joined us while I waited for my answer.

"No one has gone further than the moon. Its an odd question." I'd barely had any time to get my hopes up, and yet, they still had a long way to fall.

"Have more people... from the sky..." I didn't quite finish the question, dimly aware that some of Ghara's language had slipped in. Jinny blinked at me. Bahr tried to help.

"She's asking about people from the sky."

"From where?"

"The sky." Jinny repeated it, incorrectly. They were mixing up words between the two dialects. Jinny translated something into sign language. Judging by her face and, a moment later, Bahr's, she did not get a nice answer. The crew member bared his teeth at me and pointed towards the seats. Jinny signed something, angrily, back at him and stomped to the other side of the ship. Bahr and I followed.

A moment later, as far as I could tell, he was getting the silent equivalent of an earful from his boss.

I glanced at Bahr. "You... know what he said to me?"

He shrugged, looking a bit embarrassed. "You learn the ---- ... the bad words first. I don't speak ----- but I know those words."

It had been difficult to read the crew's expressions up close, and it was near impossible from far away. With the number of translations that had been needed, I wasn't even sure what Jinny had asked him on my behalf, or how good her knowledge of their sign language was. It was more than possible that we were the ones in the wrong, and had insulted him on accident.

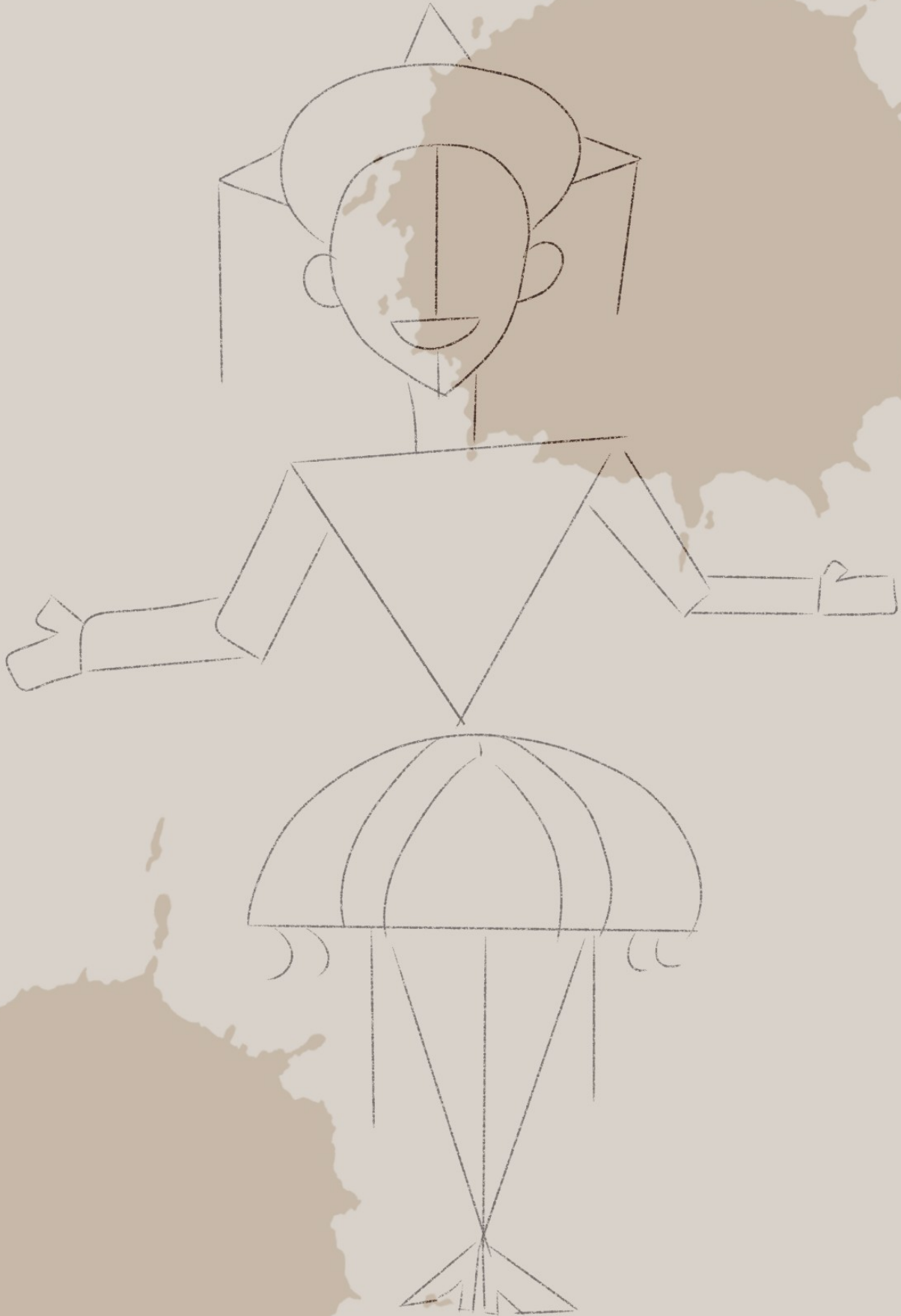
A few minutes later the ship rose into the sky. There were no windows in the cargo bay, but we seemed to be traveling in a straight line. I took the note from the librarian out of my bag and scanned through the Portuguese sections. There were a few words that were similar to their English counterparts, or what I could only assume were their English counterparts. The word 'família' came up a few times.

Either the man simply missed his family and wrote about them often, or they had come here with him. Maybe they were still here.

I turned to Bahr. "*How old is it?*" I pointed to the paper.

"*The ----? I don't know. Why?*"

"*He talks about his family...*" I shook my head and picked a different question that Bahr might actually be able to answer. The back of the paper had a drawing on it.



"What is this?"

"I have seen it before. It's from ----. I don't think it's a good ---- ----- . I don't know much about -----  
----- . ----- ---- in the mountains ---- moon ----. Sorry." His voice trailed off as he realized I was giving him a blank look. I'd missed most of those words, understanding just enough to realize he didn't know what it was. I showed the picture to Jinny.

"Oswin. That's Oswin." I asked for more information, but she didn't give it. "I only know the name. I'm from -----."

I felt it in my stomach when we started to descend a couple of hours later. A member of the crew came into the cargo bay and started gesturing for us to leave as soon as the door began to open.

He walked with us to the exit, watching us leave. I glanced up at him and he didn't make eye contact with me; Instead he was staring at the yellow ring on my head. He looked from me to Bahr. I couldn't read his expression.

It was easy to find our way again once we had left the ship. The mountains were an obvious point of reference.

"How close are we?" I asked Bahr as he started to lead the way to a narrow dirt path without hesitation. I realized I had no idea what directions the librarian had given him, and how detailed we were.

"I don't know. Maybe ---- ---- ----- . It's a ---- ---- town." I frowned, but didn't ask for any more clarification.

He stopped walking about an hour later, and for a brief moment I thought he was lost. Then he took off his backpack and started taking out root vegetables. I was hungry too, and wondered how long it would have taken me to notice if Bahr hadn't stopped us.

"Listen," said Bahr, halfway through our meal. I stopped chewing but heard nothing.

"I don't understand. What is it?"

"There are no trees that way." He pointed towards the northwest, slightly away from the mountains we'd been headed for.

"How..." I shook my head. How his senses worked was not the important question. "Why is that important?"

"No trees, but houses. There are people down there." I finished my lunch in one, too big bite. Bahr stood up and started leading the way off the path and through the trees, dagger in one hand and half finished vegetable in the other. I listened hard to hear what he could hear, but all I was aware of was the sound of insects. He looked human enough that I'd assumed his sense of the world around him was the same as mine, but I really had no reason to believe that. He could have been completely color blind. He could have had the ability to see twice as many colors as I could. I would have no idea.

He stopped us a few minutes later, quietly with the wave of his hand. I listened, and this time I did hear something. A few dead leaves had been crushed just behind us. I took out my gun again, keeping it pointed down at the ground until I knew for sure there was something to shoot at. Bahr said something aloud, and I hoped it was 'we come in peace.'

Someone responded, and a hand and half a face poked out from behind a tree. I looked at her mouth first - no tusks. Then we made eye contact. Bahr repeated what he had said.

The woman stepped out onto the path. She was holding a machete and dressed in plain brown clothes like Bahr's. We stared at each other for half a minute, maybe longer. She didn't have tusks, or antlers, or feathers growing out of her head.

She said something that sounded like the word 'human' in English, and I was nodding before I realized that it wasn't. It was of the same meaning, but in one of English's latin cousins. I felt both relief and the onset of a headache.

## Chapter 14

"I'm sorry, I don't speak your language..." I said.

"English?" Her accent was heavy.

"Do you know English?" I asked, slowly, pronouncing every word with care.

"Yes, a little." She took a few steps forward, looked from me to Bahr, then up to the yellow ring on my head. "How long have you been here? Where are the others?"

"The... others?"

"The others in your ship?"

"It's just me. I came alone." She blinked.

"I think you should come to our ...." She struggled to think of the English word, and I was too impatient to let her find it.

"Our? There are more of you? More humans?" She nodded.

"Come with me." She looked to Bahr. "You too."

I had to translate for Bahr this time, letting him know where we were headed. We followed her down the slope and deeper into the woods.

"My name is Luciene. What are you called?"

"I'm Marie. This is Bahr."

"*Hello, Bahr. My name is Luciene.*" If Bahr was surprised that she could speak his language as well, he didn't show it.

Had I not met our guide, I would have assumed that the little village she was leading us into was no different from the one we had left. The buildings were constructed in the same fashion, the roads were somewhere between dirt and gravel, and the area was dotted with animals that looked like livestock. The only difference, the only thing I cared about, was the people. They were all humans. Heads turned as we walked through, and stayed on us once their owners registered that I was both one of them and not from here. I tried not to stare back. I couldn't help but notice their clothes, of the same style and material as Bahr's. Other than their faces, they looked more like him than they did me.

The only object that was out of place was sat between two buildings, like a trashcan in an alleyway. It was metal and round, with plates sticking out in a few different directions. It took me a moment to realize what it was. It was a satellite, albeit a very broken one.

Luciene lead us to a structure that was some where between a tent and a building. Inside was spacious, with a few long tables and not much else. There were a couple of people at the far end and they didn't notice us at first.

"*Mom!*" It took me a second to register that she'd said it in neither Portuguese nor in English, but in Bahr's language. One of the women sitting at the table turned to look up. "*What is it?*"

"*We have ----.*" By this point Bahr and I had followed her all the way to the far end of the tent. Our guide's mother was sitting with two other, slightly older women. I had the distinct feeling of walking into a meeting of great importance, a feeling I'd experienced at home, occasionally, when among ambassadors or generals. The symbols were different of course — a scattering of grey hairs among dark instead of medals or uniforms. But with their postures, the choice of symbols, the indicators of experience, hardly mattered. Luciene's mother looked me up and down, taking an extra half second on the ring on my head, then gave Bahr the same treatment. I couldn't tell what impression we'd given her. I knew we weren't likely to change it.

"*My name is Isadora. Who are you?*"

"*My name is Marie, this is Bahr,*" I replied, slowly, unsure if I should ask if we could speak English, or if I should just muddle through the language Luciene had chosen.

"*Are you ----? And also ----?*" I glanced at Luciene.

"*Yes, she is. Yes and -----*" Luciene did not ask me to confirm whatever information she was giving her mother.

"*When did you ---- on ----?*" At this Luciene turned to me.

"Um, what was the question?" I asked her. Surprise flashed across Isadora's face, so brief it may not have been there at all.

"When did you get here? How long have you been here?" said Luciene.

"Ah." I nodded. I hadn't kept track. Keeping track would have meant marking the days, like a prisoner. I was trapped enough without the visual reminder. "A couple of months, maybe. I don't know."



Isadora was nodding slowly before Luciene had finished translating for her. "And where are the rest? The other people with you?" Isadora's accent was thicker than Luciene's had been, and for a moment I didn't recognize her speech as English.

"I came alone. I crashed." One of the other women at the table let out a small gasp. Isadora glanced at Bahr, then back to me.

"I think I understand. Is someone coming for you? Is help coming?"

My last meal was suddenly back in my throat. "No. I don't think so. I'm sorry." Luciene translated this into Bahr's language. Whether it was for him or for the women at the table, I had no idea. Isadora let out a small sigh, allowed herself brief moment of self pity, then continued.

"Do you have a ship? Does it work?"

"Yes and no. It is broken. It's sending out a distress signal."

Isadora nodded and said nothing more. The woman on her left cleared her throat. She was the oldest in the group and quite thin. Strength may have left her limbs in the last decade, but it had found its home in her eyes. It served her better there. "Have you eaten? Would you like... " she struggled to come up with the next word in English. "*Do you need a place to ----?*"

"*Yes, thank you,*" Bahr replied, and I nodded in agreement.

"Go and rest. Then tomorrow, we will talk more," Isadora declared. The older woman stood up and started to lead us out of the tent.

"Oh, one other thing," I said. "Have you heard of Henrique de Matos?" There was a moment of silence, an uncomfortable one. Then a conversation broke out in rapid Portuguese, and Bahr was giving me a look that said 'What did you do?' much more clearly than he could have spoken it. The older woman finally turned to me.

"Where did you hear that name?"

"His grave... I'm sorry..." She shouted something to the group in Portuguese, and they all fell silent.

"We will talk more tomorrow," Isadora repeated. It was clearly a dismal.

Luciene followed us out. I made eye contact with her, to see if she'd answer my question without me having to bring it up myself. She complied, after a moment's hesitation. "Henrique de Matos was my

father. He was the captain of the ship that crashed here. It's his fault it crashed. It will be best if you don't say that name again."

Luciene left us as soon as we'd left the building and the older woman led us to a small house near the center of the village. She gave us food from an underground cellar, accessed from a hatch just outside the house. She told us, in a mix of Bahr's language, English, and gestures, that we could use the cot sitting in an alcove just behind the dining area we'd been seated in upon arriving. It was small, not for one person but certainly for two. It was the closest thing I'd seen to a real bed in quite a while.

"Would you like new..." she looked me up and down as she tried to remember the English word.

"Clothes?" I glanced down at myself. My current clothes, both the set on my back and the set in my bag, were a mess. They smelled like me, which had not been a nice smell in weeks. There was a layer of dirt along the edge of each pant leg, followed by more caked on streaks scattered up my legs and onto my shirt. There were random tears I didn't remember creating on both my sleeves. Any food stains I'd gotten on them had simply become a part of the fabric, and this planet's fruit juices were just as unforgiving as their earthly equivalents.

They were one of a dwindling number of things that reminded me of home.

"Yes, I would like new clothes. Can you show me where I could wash these?" She looked at me, confused. I repeated the question, slowly, and then she nodded.

The new clothes were only new to me, as I had expected, but compared to what I'd been wearing they were a shining example of luxury. The fabric was all the same muted brown color and it was light, almost like linen. It looked like what Bahr wore. I looked down at myself, having no other way to see my appearance with no mirror anywhere in the house. I wondered if it would bring Bahr some piece of mind to see me like this, less alien. It would have brought me piece of mind to see someone dressed like me.

I stepped back into the dining room after changing. "*They look like yours,*" I commented, pulling at my shirt as I looked at Bahr.

"No." He frowned. "*That's women's -----.*"

"No, I meant it's the same fabric..." I stopped, realizing I was speaking English. I couldn't remember making that mistake before.

"*You'll have to teach me your language now.*"

I grinned. "English. *My language is called English.*"