

The Colonists

Mary snapped on the view screen to see if it was true. The phone was ringing again, but she was mesmerized. It *was* true. There it was—the ship. It was sleek and looked like dull aluminum blackened on the bottom with a flat silver-grey metallic crown. The news anchor was on site and sounded more like she was at a golf match, rather than the beginning or end of the world. "There is no sound from the engines. The ship seems to move by some invisible force, perhaps gravity itself has been inverted to float it above us. What a momentous silence!" The thing floated and turned, bowing, nodding toward its side, slipping slowly toward the cameras as all of the world watched. In a graceful hush it descended, and pressed itself quietly into the earth. The hatch opened and the world held its breath in a single gulp, an unblinking chasm of hungry disbelief, and then, a gasp, humanity united to see the truth—to swallow hard and feel a single lump in the throat to know it: we are not alone. We are no longer at the top of the food chain. Here, stands one better.

The creature was clad in a supple liquid foil suit which adhered to its skin. It was slender and genteel, gaunt and graceful as a silver shadow playing over the earth below—she removed her hood and allowed the world to behold her radiance. She was awash in feather like scales of a thousand luxuriant and subtle hues, the sunlight cast a melody of color upon her feathered skin, now pink and golden, blue and crimson, a swirl of color, a tangled web of tone and shade passed over her skin and spilt out into the air, as if choreographed in light, the sight and song of her soul caressed the sun itself, and painted the air with her thoughts. Even before she spoke, all the world had seen it, and was hers.

"People of Earth I greet you on behalf of the people of Elsayna. My name is Elsyra. I am one, and you are many and I wish you no harm, for I am no fool. We of Elsayna offer you peace and long life, prosperity and the calm of our purest heart, so you may flourish alongside us, and we alongside you. In this way let all need end for both our peoples, and may a new infinite day of wisdom enfold us all." Mary snapped off the view screen and knew, she had to get involved.

The next day a second craft arrived, much larger than the first. This second craft contained about one hundred and fifty of the Elsaynians, who were to stay here on Earth. They were all but helpless without their liquid silver suits which compensated for the planetary gravity difference. Although beautiful and super-intelligent, the Elsaynians were frail, weak creatures. They were also extraordinarily old. Thousands of years seemed to pass for them as hours do for us. This was their secret and their gift for us, all but eternal longevity and the ecstasies of contemplative thought. "The eternal mind"—this is what they offered us. It was not exactly clear what we offered them in return, but it hardly seemed to matter as their scientists got to work. They had brought several strange six legged creatures, each with a single large rolling eye. The cows were blissfully reposed, resplendently relaxed and contented, and seemed to radiate a sense of peace and good will. It was explained that this was no illusion, but was a property of the brain emanations of the placid beasts, an indescribable fulfillment akin to the sage's mirror still soul. These emanations could be harvested in special spherical and cylindrical chambers so as to be used for any number of purposes.

First, the interplanetary travelers brought these vessels laden with sublime bovine energies to the prison. The Elsaynian scientists could sense the enormous violence, which seemed to have a visceral effect on them; the head Elsaynian nearly collapsing in the doorway, needing to adjust his silver suit to compensate for his weakened state. The warden came out to meet them, and again, the Elsaynian scientist was visibly shaken, "No, no, no, the prisoners later...later! First, who is the enlightened one in charge—oh no—such sickness," and the scientist collapsed. Once

revived by his compatriots, and informed that this *was* the warden, not a prisoner, the order was given, and the first treatment administered. The warden promptly unclenched his jaw and lost the steel grey hate in his stare. The results were amazing. The entire prison population was treated and released by noon. Soon, the procedure was repeated in mental hospitals and prisons throughout the land. These people were cured—even the warden. They now had a life expectancy which exceeded the years of ten generations. The Elsaynians were coming through.

In exchange, the Elsaynians had requested that a group of volunteer subjects from Earth accompany a few of them back to their home planet. A skeleton crew would man the big ship and the beautiful creature who had made first contact would take four more in her slower, smaller craft. The swell of volunteers was astronomical, and it was nothing short of a miracle that Mary was picked. She thought her heart would burst from excitement as she heard the news! Mary was ill with cystic fibrosis and had never imagined that she might be chosen, although she had hoped for nothing else. Her hands ached from praying, and now her eyes were red from shedding tears of joy. Her heart seemed as if it might crawl from her chest, and she all but forgot her lungs. Mary was saved.

She was so relieved to meet her fellow travelers in the small ship! She had worried with such a long journey, in such close quarters together, whether she could stand anyone for all those years, but she immediately realized that it was okay. Sam, Carl and George were the most cultured, caring and sincere people she had ever met. They took to her overtly honest manner at once, and the four would have been inseparable from that moment just to have met, even without a new adventure to bind their friendship. Elsyra was delighted to see their instant rapport, and her feathered skin blushed in radiant cascades of blue, purple and rose, betraying her contentment.

The two crafts were set to all but pilot and land themselves, one with Elsyra and her four earthling crew-mates, and the other larger speedier craft with one hundred earthlings aboard and a skeleton crew of extraterrestrials. The ships were filled, and gracefully took to the night sky. Slipping silently upward into the ink-black breath of the universe where all things are alone, clad in but a black slip of cold ether—out here, all things are to themselves, nothing and no one miss what is gone, what is not with, but only between all distant, warm worlds.

Although any journey through the stark void of space is a moving loneliness such as this, on the small craft a warm world of four filled Mary's endless days with every nuance of friendship and happiness. As lovers who did not love and so loved all the more, their closeness grew until each shared the others' very thoughts. In fact, Time itself had stretched and blurred in the constant motion of travel and tenderness, which held the years one before and into the next, tumbling through and into each other, passing down the throat of Time into the future, which is our name for the present we hope one day to have.

One night, the three men heard a still thing, and so, listened more and more closely until they grasped the message Elsyra had sent, and understood the truth: "Yes, I am feeling wonderful! Three thousand years and a child again! I will see you soon, and you will hardly know me, so young am I now! She felt nothing, and the whole of what she was passed into the vessel. Oh...she was so beautiful..."

Sam, Carl and George all understood the alien tongue and knew it at once—why they were exchanged with those scientists and sent up here... to these creatures: so the Elsaynians could harvest their life force, put their souls into a damn drum—spent—to make these parasites immortal! They killed Mary! *They killed Mary!* The three shook and wept, but remained silent.

So genteel and upright were they, that a course of action above reproach, the exact plan, came at once to one and to all. As Elsyra slept they crept to the communications room and engaged the device. Carl was the best spoken of the lot, and was charged with the job of acting, "Hey there big craft, it's Carl here! How you doing today?" Carl was perfect. He seemed utterly cheerful. "Hey, can I talk to Captain Jackson, I've got a question for him. It's kind of personal." Soon Captain Jackson came on the line. "Captain, you alone? Good. Look man, I figured it out—these *things* are taking us up there to eat our souls so they can live forever! Do you hear? They killed Mary! They killed Mary! Jackson—she's dead."

As soon as Carl was finished, he did not wait for a reply, but clicked it off and started to weep. The three went into their chamber to make damn well sure they never ended up as soul food. Elsyra, heard the compartment depressurize, and saw the bodies burst...floating in space.

Jackson knew exactly what to do. First...he passed one of the Elsaynian crewmen on the way to the control room, and asked him...real nice...to show Jackson some details about the ship. The crewman was jubilant to have finally bonded with one of the earth-creatures, who had expressed a genuine interest in a common topic. Xonaponz was the odd man out when it came to space-creatures, and Jackson knew he would come through. Even ET can get lonely. After extracting some information about landing the ship, Jackson grabbed its spindly little neck, pinched it closed, and snapped it. Dead bug. The boys were informed, and soon, the ship was theirs.

Jackson did what he was trained to do—he took charge. Everyone was crazy worked up to find out about it and Jackson restrained them from outright hysteria by sheer force of will. He divided the men and women into kill squads. He doubled the rations. He assigned some poor woman the unenviable job of stewing up the dead Elsaynian crew to further supplement caloric intake. He killed one of those weird cows they had with them, and man...that thing was pretty tasty! About like the real thing! Gravity was turned up to almost double that on Earth. They were in training. By the time they hit the beach on Elsayna, this crew would be a wall of solid muscle: screaming, fit and vicious to within an inch of its life. Jackson was special forces trained—he was trained to train men, and these men, would be the teeth of a single lion's will—without failing or mercy. At twice the muscle of normal Earth folks and half the gravity, they would be supermen, and may just do more than survive. This...could be fun.

Elsaynians don't weep, they fade. They do not mourn...they asphyxiate their own happiness and die. This is why they are such an honest, giving and happy people. Elsyria was their best. She had failed to keep her promise—failed to help her cherished new friends, failed to allow her life's work and worth even enough happiness to live! She loved Mary so very much, and was sure, to provide to her all the very best medical treatment, and indeed, Mary had lived for two hundred and forty earth years. But, thirty minutes before the end, Elsyra took her entitlement, and placed Mary beyond those last few minutes of torment and pain—instead of the worst of life's last suffering, Mary was eased into a gentle sleep, her last drops of precious energy collected rather than squandered into the void, Elsyra took those few last drops as her own... to live forever...and with this blessed drop, a spark of the divine, a fleck of Mary's love, was still alive within her, and as she had cared for Mary, so now Mary cared for her, and was given a bit of immortality within Elysia. In this way, these two races might live forever...the earthlings for a hundred generations, then a thousand more, for having been spared the worst of life's torment, their souls no longer wasted to blackness, but immortal, as a drop of happiness in the colorful sea of Elsyra's soul. She had failed. To give Mary two hundred and forty years and immortality was a cheat and a disgrace, and she was a disgrace, for thinking herself worthy of the role. She had failed, and would die—slowly. She was a curse to be spoken no more.

Now Elsyra's colorful feathered skin became grey, and she choked herself with herself—her failure feasted upon her tender heart, and she became ashen, dull and short of breath. The shimmering opal feathers of her happiness turned slowly dimmer, and came to despise their very beauty, to choke themselves and diminish themselves, to squeeze out the last of their opal dancing light, and die. The colors slowly began to leave her face as she held her happiness in contempt, choked black and ash...dirt and dust to foul her tender heart. In a week's time, her sunken breast began to lose its flesh, and the feathers fell to the deck, one by one, each hollow tear of beauty, rotten and moldering, allowed to fall, disgraced, hollow and worthless as was she, who failed, and died.

Jackson stood before them, and judged what he saw to be fit, and trembling, like a spring bent near to breaking, aching to release its tension, its hunger too great to stand, the need for the moment too pungent and acrid to tolerate—the hundred vibrated in rage and fear which became more black than any ordinary rage: as a mother is afraid for her children, as the earth bursts forth from a volcano on the sea bed and is no longer afraid of the sea...but will crack open the waves and cover them in an island which craves, needs, to be born...so did the hundred strain to be still and silent, pregnant with tension and reddest fear, with wide eyes and ears they heard Jackson, and he judged them ready.

"They have brought us here to feast on our souls...our lives. They have killed Mary." He waited. The silence drove them mad to boiling, pregnant with boiling need and sick with angst, he let them seethe, then...continued: "Now, the hour is at hand. Vengeance and justice are as one single motion, one blow, and we are the supreme fist, most deadly and right, tight, poised and ready." The crowd groaned under the strain of his words, the air shuddered under the weight of the silence. Now louder, Jackson continued: "They killed her, killed Mary, and we will see it repaid, not with more innocent human blood, no, NO! We will not abide our destruction with closed eyes and peaceful, staring, glazed faces, we will take this wretched violent people and dispose of them as they did us first! So, know Mary, and know—you are next...if we do not act exactly as we know we must, as we have planned: we must destroy these filthy maggots—we must kill these insects! These parasites must be burned into ash and killed... *dead!* Do you know what kind of vermin kills and innocent girl? Look out there and see it! Look—and know the face of disease! Are you ready?" A single heaving bellow of wet red hate came like a sticky, prickly cloud of electric charge on the wind to respond: "YES!" "Are you ready?... Ready to kill these insects... ready to **KILL these filthy vermin, are you ready to kill...kill these worthless parasites?**" "**YES!!!**"

Jackson looked, and every eye was wide, glazed in power and hate, every muscle and sinew tensed and ready to explode into the low gravity environment, every brain shut down except for the very most basic wiring, ready to follow any command and act on the carefully planned instincts he had honed in them. It was time.

The ship opened its hatch, and the men sprung out like wild animals, daemons with spring legs of meat and bone, tearing through the atmosphere...trembling meat and teeth brought down into the tender flesh of the unsuspecting aliens. Their necks were broken, their arms snapped and spun off, their eyes poked, pried and placed into pockets as souvenirs...and the cows...how they killed them and tore into their docile, stupid, unresisting flesh and tortured them! A sheer delight! Bounding effortlessly some 20 yards at a stretch, the killing was natural and easy. Strange luminous blood flowed like wine into the alien earth, and as the finest of wine, it was accompanied by the ringing pulse of jubilant laughter and happiness! Oh...how easily they died! Oh, how right and pleasurable it is to be a just spring, finally allowed to release its coil, able to

avenge and cleanse this disease!

It took but a scant week to kill them all. It seemed all these wretched people did was think, meditate and talk—they were completely unable to offer any resistance to the clearly superior human intellect and tactics. How strange that these dull, docile animals could have created such technology as those ships! Hmm...Perhaps one could be sent back to Earth on autopilot. Jackson advised Earth to kill the resident aliens, send some real people and real cows so they could get started. The place was ransacked beyond any use—everything and everyone was left for dead, but it wasn't a total loss. It would be a few hundred years before we could come collect the prize, but now that the bugs were dead, there was some good news: Earth, had its first extraterrestrial colony.

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