

# Downstream

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# S

tone! Stone...”

Even as she called to him the voice of his mother was failing, attenuating into the silence of Downstream.

Keeping his fingers and toes jammed into the rock of the Floor, Stone lifted his head and looked Down-stream. The current battered the back of his skull.

His mother held up her arms to him, the fingers which had failed her outstretched. Her face, with its halo of greying hair, sank like a dream into the un-attainable Downstream.

Already, in mere heartbeats, she was lost, much too far Downstream for anyone to climb down to her and return.

“I’ll always love you!” he cried.

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When his mother fell Stones-of-Ice had been feeding on a fat tube-spider’s egg. He’d spotted the Larva trapping the egg moments earlier.

The Larva was a cylinder of translucent flesh, fixed to the Floor with a circlet of fine hooks. Its body was much taller than a man’s, and it reached far into Midstream, away from the Floor; pale, feathery fans, fluttering in the Stream, grabbed at the fine morsels of food that tumbled down from the unknowable Up-stream.

The Larva supported the little linear colony of fifty adults and children. The Larva's pickings from Midstream were much more nutritious than the fragments which bowled along in the stale currents close to the Floor.

One day the Larva would unpin its hook-roots and swim off Downstream, on its way to its next, unknow-able, stage of life. The people would have to follow it — gingerly clambering Downstream — or die.

Stones-of-Ice had climbed cautiously along the body of the patient, insensate Larva, reaching for the fans. He'd avoided the Larva's flickering tongue as it patiently coated the fans with sticky mucus. He took the egg from the outstretched fans and edged away from the Larva, clambering over the backs of the people. They clung to their tenuous holds, fingers and toes anchored deep in the rock, heads bent against the current. Infants squirmed, tucked securely between bodies and rock Floor; they lapped at the tiny pool-drops of water which clung to the rock face.

Stone had passed Flower-of-Bones, his kid sister, and broke off a piece of the egg for her. Flower was so named after a particularly spectacular configuration of bones, not even remotely human, which had come drifting down from Upstream on the day she was born. He had given her the egg, and Flower had grin-ned at him around a sticky mouthful. As she ate she pressed the palm of her hand against her mouth, so that her long fingers reached up and over her scalp, like a mask of pink flesh.

... And then his mother had fallen.

"Stone..."

Receding rapidly she was still calling to him, still pointing. He saw the dull sparkle of her necklace as a point of light in the Downstream darkness. The necklace was a thing of chitin bits threaded on a rope — crude and precious. He remembered how she'd taken him to the Larva as an infant, helped him reach up for his first succulent morsels.

He would never see her again.

He probed at his feelings. He was wistful, he sup-posed, but not sad; old age — *losing hold* — came to them all, in the end.

But she seemed, even now, to be pointing. And not at him. Past him.

He raised his face into the oncoming Stream. The invisible substance battered his cheeks, but he breathed easily; the air which sustained him

was a still, superfluid component of this swirling, endless flow. He peered Upstream. A storm cloud could be deadly — fat with raindrops and laden with electricity — and they would have to shelter. But, ultimately, a cloud would be a thing to be welcomed: the rain replenished the life-giving sheen of water droplets, clinging to the Floor by surface tension, which kept them all alive...

Then he saw it. Not a cloud, not even a hailstorm of the type which had given him his name. Something far stranger came tumbling along the Floor: an ungainly corpse from some community far Upstream, impossibly long limbs flailing. And it came straight at Flower-of-Bones.

Flower — and their father — hadn't noticed the incoming danger. But even as she fell his mother had tried to warn him.

*"No!"*

He lifted himself away from the Floor. The Stream battered at his chest. He scabbled sideways across the Floor, jabbing his fingers and toes carelessly into gaps in the crumbling rock.

Once he lost his footing; for an instant he clung by one hand to the rock, his legs dangling, his body flap-ping against the surface. But he hauled himself back to the Floor and scrambled on, careless of the danger. He had to reach Flower before that tumbling corpse.

“Flower! *Flower!*”

He clambered over the patient line of people, past his father, grabbing for holds at shoulders and hair. Flower was just beyond his reach, now. She'd seen the corpse and she screamed, bits of egg still clinging to her chin and mouth.

He risked a single glance Upstream. The corpse, angular, suited in a carapace of armour, was close enough for him to see into its staring, eyeless skull-sockets.

He grabbed Flower. He wrenched her away from the Floor and lifted her high into the Stream. She wriggled, limbs fluttering in the current. Stone arced her, one-armed, back over his body and brought her down into the arms of his father.

His father wrapped his arms around Flower, pin-ning her tight.

Stone looked up.

The skull-face of the Upstream corpse, peering from an outlandish helmet, plunged straight at him.

The body engulfed him, a spider of bones and chitin armour. Long, multi-jointed limbs wrapped themselves around him. He felt angular elbows, lumps of decayed, feathery flesh, dig into his back.

The skull was long and distorted; the remains of vast lips flapped before his face. He screamed, squirming, trying to push the thing off him.

He lost his grip.

He fell upwards, away from the Floor. The Stream snatched at him, harder than he had imagined; it seemed to wrap a fist of pressure around his chest. The bony, distorted corpse fell away from him, fold-ing over itself.

He reached below him, trying to turn —

But the Floor was out of reach.

He swivelled, turning his face Upstream. Already his people were falling away from him, a row of skinny bodies clinging to the Floor around

the waving tube of the Larva. He saw — or imagined he saw — the faces of his father, of Flower, turned down to him in shock.

He heard the voice of his father, drifting Down-stream to him. “We’ll always love you...”

That was all. Soon the murk of distance enclosed even the Larva’s tubular form.

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Midstream was cold, silent, empty save for food-fragments which drifted around him; the lichen-glow of the Floor picked out only the corpse from far Upstream, his sole, grinning com-panion.

No one could travel Upstream. He would never see his people again. He stared into the unending dark-ness of Downstream.

So, in heartbeats, his life had ended.

The Upstream corpse tumbled as it fell alongside him. It was almost graceful in its slow, languid move-ments — but it was impossibly alien: its arms and legs were twice the length of Stone’s, and its fingers — reduced to chains of bones — were thin and multi-jointed.

The face, with its immense, rotting lips, looked as if it was designed to clamp onto the Floor surface. Stone imagined a long tongue, prehensile itself, flicking out of that ugly mouth and delving for food deep into fine cracks in the Floor; perhaps the mouth would be strong enough to hold the body against the flow of the current alone. The head, torso and legs were encased in sheets and tubes of armour — chitin from some animal, softly luminescent, stitched together.

Someone had killed this strange warrior and sent it tumbling Downstream.

Warrior? It was more like a spider, Stone thought with disgust. Stone’s people were real humans — the original form which had emerged from the Crash, spilling into the Stream so long ago. This spider-warrior — and its stranger cousins from even further Upstream — were aberrations. Mutants.

He lifted his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around his legs, letting the Stream buffet him, apathetic.

Far Upstream, there were huge, strange communities. Vast wars were fought. Sometimes bodies rained down from Upstream, thicker than food fragments.

How the spider-folk lived — and what their battles were about — no one could know, of course. It was impossible to climb Upstream to find out. And only once in Stone's memory had a living human ever travelled down the Stream to Stone's people — another wounded soldier, one arm severed, eyes bloodied and staring. It had sailed over Stone, screaming insane curses; Stone had cowered against the Floor, in the shelter of his father's arms...

A touch at his back.

At first it was feather-light, almost ticklish. Then, in an instant, it became firm, enclosing, grasping; it felt as if he had been wrapped in a hundred thin, sticky ropes.

He struggled, opening out his limbs. Clinging threads stretched between his legs and pinned his arms to his body.

Spider-web.

The web was a broad cylinder, anchored to the Floor. Its mouth was wide but the web funnelled rapidly into a narrow neck. The webbing stretched, elastic, hauling him down from the Stream. He fell into the neck; the walls of the web-tube were soft, warm, yielding. Floor-lichen light filled the web, making it a corridor of spectral beauty.

Damn. Was it over so quickly? How could he have been so stupid? A spider-web was visible enough; if he'd been watching, he'd have had plenty of time to swim up and out of the way.

The gauzy webbing seemed only to tighten as he struggled.

After a few heartbeats he gave up; he relaxed in the enfolding grip of the web, letting its sticky, half-alive substance wrap tighter around his legs.

His breath slowed. Gradually, his mood softened; soon he felt strangely at peace. Since losing his grip on the Floor he'd been doomed anyway. It was comfortable here, in a way even secure. The web was soft, mistily pretty...

At least it was done. His endless, purposeless fall through the Stream was finished. No more questions; no more hope; no more events. He closed his eyes. Perhaps he'd be able to slide quietly into insensibility as the lack of food overcame him...

The web shuddered.

... And again, rattling him in his cage of sticky web-stuff. His muscles clenched. His eyes snapped open.

*The spider.* It was coming at him, spiralling out from the throat of the web, clambering around the widening walls. Its legs flickered, long, feathery, and that mouth — with mandibles endlessly scissoring — would slip easily around Stone's head.

His elegiac mood of acceptance vanished, washed away into the Downstream of his awareness. Sud-denly, vividly, *he did not want to die.* He lunged against the web bonds, screaming, causing the web itself to ripple. But his struggles seemed only to add strength to the webbing around him.

The spider's body was coated in fine, white hairs; a ghastly moustache of fur lined its mouth, meat parti-cles clinging...

"Stone. Stone!"

Flower's voice? He was dreaming, of course; fan-tasizing — and now the spider was close, close —

He stared into that mouth, he fear fading into fasci-nation. He wondered how long a snipped-off head would remain aware, as it tumbled into the pit of digestive juices inside the spider.

A ripping sound, behind him; a small, warm hand scrabbling over his back. "Stone! You've got to get out of there!"

He twisted his head, straining his trapped neck. "Flower-of-Bones?"

His sister was clinging to the outside of the web, strands of the stuff trailing from her lithe limbs. She was hacking at the web with a chip of smashed-off Floor. She looked into his eyes, her sweet, familiar face creased with anxiety.

Energy, urgency flooded him. He got a leg free. He kicked at the

webbing, scraping the stuff away from his other leg. Flower cut through the web around one arm; he took her scraper and dragged the crude edge through the webbing around his other arm, careless of gouges in his flesh.

He pushed his way backwards — at last — out of the web. Strands clung to his flesh, stretching, as if nostalgic for his presence.

The jaws of the spider loomed over the hole in the web. Mandibles protruded from that sightless sketch of a face, seeking the spider's lost meal; then a long, black tongue began to lick at the webbing, extruding new strands to plate over the gap the humans had wrought.

Stone clutched Flower to him, relishing her warm, familiar scent.

Then, hand in hand, they let themselves fall away from the web and tumble Downstream.

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Above and around them there was only the dark-ness of the endless, infinite, unknowable Midstream. Below them was the Floor, its coat of lichen softly glowing, its rocky surface worn smooth by the current.

Flower was staring down moodily. "I wonder where it comes from."

"What?"

"The Stream." Her face was round, child-like — well, she was still a child — but there was a calm depth, an intelligence there.

He smiled at her, in the manner of an adult. "The Stream is a mixture of two fluids," he told her. "The bulk of it is a *superfluid* — stationary, light and frictionless — and that's the part that contains the air we breathe. The rest of the Stream is a viscous mass, flow-ing at high speed, and that's what we *feel* as the Stream — that's what is sweeping us along like this. The two components flow through each other; it's as if they were two separate Streams in the same space, in fact. And it's just as well for us that they are sepa-rate, for we couldn't draw breath if we had to take our air from the viscous part of the Stream, and —"

"That's not what I asked," she said, sounding irri-tated.

He was disconcerted. "What?"



“Oh, come on, Stones-of-Ice. All you’re doing is parroting what father used to tell us —”

“Parroting?” He was appalled at her disrespect. “But this is learning which has survived since the Crash itself.”

“Yes,” she said with strained patience, “but it’s not telling me anything I want to know.” She stared into the huge, empty volumes around them. “I want to know where the Stream comes from — where it’s going to. Where would we end up, if we never went down to the Floor again?”

“We’d end up dead,” he said practically. “Starved.”

“Where did people come from? How did they get here? Are there people all the way Downstream, forever and ever? And all the way Upstream as well?”

“We’ll never know.” Questions like these occasionally occurred to Stone, but they never troubled him. The Stream was just there, all around him. It gave his world its framework: Downstream was forever separated from here, which was forever separated from Upstream — as surely as his own childhood was separated from him forever by the flow of time.

“But why can’t we know?”

She looked at him, and suddenly he felt embarrassed that he could not give her an answer.

He felt resentful. He owed his life to his sister, but — he realized slowly — she might actually be smarter than he was. It wasn’t a comfortable thought —

Flower-of-Bones gasped. She pointed, pulling Stone closer to her.

Suddenly, the Floor wasn’t featureless... There were people here, unimaginably far Downstream as they were, great sheets of them clinging to the rock like human lichen.

In wordless panic brother and sister clawed at the thin, powerful Stream, trying to swim up and away from the Floor and deeper into Midstream.

They were suspended over a city of squat chitin buildings, of structures of rope and web, bright lichen-pits hacked into the Floor... and

dozens, hundreds of people. It was a community unimaginably larger than the simple huddle of folk they'd left Upstream.

Flower whispered, "do you think they can see us?"

"No. I don't think so. Even if they could, they can't reach us." He thought it over. "Although it might be better if they could."

She looked at him, her face round and troubled. "What do you mean?"

Gently, he said, "sooner or later we're going to have to go down again, to the Floor. We'll starve up here. And it might be better to land where there are already people. They might take us in. Help us. We can't survive alone, Flower."

Flower grimaced, pulling a comical face at Stone. "But not here. Not with them. They're so ugly."

From up here the Floor-city people looked like squat animals, burrowing into the rock. Flower held up her own free hand, stretching her long fingers; she curled the fingers back over themselves, letting the tips touch the back of her hands. "Look at those people. Stubby fingers and toes, round little heads, tubes for bellies. It's amazing they can get a grip of the Floor at all."

He patted her arm affectionately. "If you think like that you shouldn't have come after me."

"It's just as well I did, spider-morsel. You wouldn't have lasted five heartbeats without me."

"I know that." He meant it; he wished he had some way of expressing it better. His sister had sacrificed everything — her parents, her people, her life itself— to fall Downstream, irrevocably, after her brother.

He searched his heart, hoping that if their positions had been reversed he would have found the courage to do the same thing.

She pointed. "Look down there. See, those tube-shapes moving along the ropes?"

Stone squinted. The translucent tubes, twice as tall as he was, edged their way through the webbing of ropes. He thought he could see people,

curled up inside the moving tubes; but that was impossible, of course, for the tubes looked like —

Like larvae. Unfamiliar forms — perhaps different species from those he was used to — but, yes, they were larvae! And people were riding inside them, in what looked like perfect comfort! Why, with such a steed it might even be possible to move Upstream — a little way anyway. And —

And, he wondered wistfully, how would it be to shelter one's head, one's aching lungs — if only for a short while — from the endless buffeting pressure of the Stream?

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The city grew sparser, with wide patches of dull Floor between the scattered settlements. At last they were sailing over bare rock once more, and the lights of the city flattened into the dis-tance.

Flower pointed at the Floor Downstream. "Look. I think it's a net farm."

Stone — still dreaming of larva-riding — twisted and looked down.

The nets lined the Floor, a family of them in a neat array, with their faces turned patiently Upstream. The nearest net was a translucent disc, barely visible in the lichen-light; it quivered as bits of current-borne waste pounded into its fine structure.

"You're right," he said. "Come on; let's go down."

They struggled through the Stream, clawing at its thin, powerful substance with their hands.

Stone dropped against the Floor, a little way Upstream from the largest net. He let his fingers and long toes pry deep into the rock face, grasping at fine crevices; the Floor was hard, warm, familiar against his chest, and he felt secure for the first time since he'd lost his grip.

Flower-of-Bones landed beside him. He patted her hand. "Let's see what we can get to eat."

Fingers and toes working, they swarmed along the Floor, Downstream towards the farm.

Flower pointed, silently, past the first net. Beyond, the solitary

farmer-beetle was labouring at its crop. The beetle's squat body was pressed flat against the Floor, smooth and streamlined; its blind head, raised into the flow, moved in steady figures-of-eight as it wove its nets.

Stone and Flower crept towards a net far from the beetle.

The net bulged in the Stream, laden with scraps. Stone wrapped the sticky threads around his hands and pulled himself to his knees, letting the flow of the Stream press him securely against the net. He found meat, bits of larvae, eggs. Much of it was decayed, of course, and some — from far Upstream — was too unfamiliar even to be safe to try. But he found some reasonably fresh fragments. He pulled a piece of spider-limb from the net — it came away with a soft plop — and passed it to Flower. He crammed a second piece into his mouth. Juices slipped down his chin as he chewed, pulling more food from the net...

Flower screamed.

He whirled. He dropped his bits of food — they went sailing over the net rim and Downstream — and he fell backwards against the net.

Two people had come upon them — two adults, a woman and a man. The woman was already lying over Flower, pinning her face-down against the Floor, easily suppressing his sister's struggles. The woman grinned, her skull round and feral. The man crawled along the Floor towards Stone. He was grim-faced, his head shaven crudely; he carried a knife of Floor-rock in his teeth, and his eyes were fixed on Stone.

He was only heartbeats away.

Stone turned, transfixed. The hunter's fingers were short, flat-tipped, and his toes mere stubs; his chest was round, scraping awkwardly against the Floor. But he moved powerfully; Stone would never be able to match such strength. And he wore a necklet — a crude thing, of chitin threaded on rope.

*His mother's.*

Was it possible? Had his mother — old, too feeble to grip — fallen among these people?

And — he found himself wondering with horror — had she been already dead when she arrived here?

The knife, underlit by the Floor's lichen, cast a deep shadow upwards over the hunter's flat nose. There was no anger in that face, Stone realized, just — *antici-pation*. Suddenly Stone saw himself through the man's pale eyes — as something weak, barely human, from the far Upstream — as meat.

The man pressed his legs flat against the Floor and raised his upper body. He lifted the knife high over Stone's face. Stone stared at the knife, saw each detail of its chipped, crudely sharpened edge.

Flower, somewhere, was screaming —

No. *It wasn't Flower.*

The man flattened himself against the Floor, shoving his knife between his teeth. He twisted trying to see what was going on.

The woman still lay atop Flower. But she was scrabbling at her neck, sharp teeth glinting in lichen-light.

A pole of wood, a spear, protruded from her back.

Flower lurched to her knees. The woman was thrown off, rolling sideways. The spear shaft scraped against the Floor. As the woman fell on the shaft there was a soft, obscene sound of tearing — the woman's eyes opened wide, seeing nothing, and her mouth stretched silently — and then the shaft broke with a sharp snap.

Head lolling, the woman fell upwards, away from the Floor. The spear shaft tumbled after her, lost in a moment.

Stone turned back to the man, raising his arms — but the hunter had already gone, scrambling sideways over the surface.

Stone lay flat against the Floor and wormed his way to his sister. Her toes and fingers dug deep in the rock, she was crying and shuddering. Stone was aware of the tightness of his own throat, the trembling of his taut muscles. He wrapped an arm over her thin back, pressing Flower securely against the Floor. "It's all right," he whispered. "They're gone."

There was a hand on his shoulder. "Yes, but there must be more of them. And they'll be back —"

Stone twisted his neck, scraping his cheek on the Floor.

A woman — squat, with spadelike fingers — lay against the Floor beside him. She was smiling at him. She lifted her arm from his shoulder, showing him her empty arms. She spoke to them, but Stone couldn't understand. She kept smiling and tried again, and this time her speech was a clatter of clicks and glottal stops; still the words were unrecognizable. The woman tried a third time, and now, suddenly, her words were clear. "It's all right," she said. "I won't hurt you. It's all right. All right. I — Do you understand me?" She grin-ned at their nods. "Good. At last." Her accent was strange, Stone thought, but her words were easily comprehensible. "My. You've fallen a long way, haven't you? Come into the larva. You'll feel better..."

"Into the what?"

She glanced over her shoulder.

Clinging to the Floor, just a short crawl away, was a larva — broad, magnificent, twice the size of *the* Larva which had sustained his family. Its fans, glistening with mucus, faced the Stream defiantly.

And beyond its translucent walls, within *the body of the larva itself*, Stone saw a human.

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Stone pressed his fingers into the flesh of the larva, wondering. He was inside the larva. The flesh-hull around him yielded, soft, moist, warm. Far above his head the larva's pads waved, and beyond the walls the Stream rushed.

The four of them — Flower, Stone and the two city-women — huddled, their legs pressed together. In the confined space Stone was aware of the scent of humans: a musty warmth he remembered from a childhood spent scurrying across the Floor beneath the safe bellies of his parents.

For the first time in his life he was out of the Stream. His head felt clear, easy, his breathing easy. It was *wonderful*.

Flower-of-Bones said, "doesn't it hurt the larva, to have us sit inside him like this?"

“No.” It was the one called *Speaker-to-Upstream* — the one who had come out to save them from the hunters, the one who had thrown the spear. She was squat, like her companion, but not without grace; she wore a suit of woven net-fabric, soft and comfortable-looking, with tools tucked into a belt. “No, we won’t hurt him.” She reached out behind herself and stroked the larva’s inner wall with a robust affection. “This is the larva’s stomach lining...But it’s designed to be open to the Stream, like this. Every stomach needs a lot of surface area, because food is digested through the surface.” She poked gently at Flower’s belly. “Your stomach is coiled up inside you — you carry around all that area, stored neatly away. The larva’s stomach is opened out — the creature is *all* stomach, really. And its body traps a pocket of the Stream, sheltering it from the current, and filters food particles from it.”

Flower looked uneasy; she squirmed away from where she was sitting.

Speaker-to-Upstream laughed. “Don’t worry; you’re much too big to digest. The larva is interested in microscopic fragments — tiny pieces — that’s all. But you asked a good question.”

She smiled at Flower. “You must have asked your-self other questions. Haven’t you ever wondered what the Stream is *for*?”

“Yes,” Flower said. “I have.”

The second woman — *Rider-of-Larvae*, Stone remembered — grinned and ruffled Flower’s hair. Flower-of-Bones glared at her until she stopped.

“Good for you. But do you have any answers?” Rider asked.

“I’ve a question. Why did you save us?” Stone demanded.

Speaker smiled. “Because you were too interesting to let those barbarians eat you up. Look.” Gently she lifted Stone’s hand, uncurled his long fingers, and pressed her own hand against his. Her palm was dry, somehow confident. But her fingers had only three joints above the knuckle, while Stone’s had six.

He let his fingers fold down over hers.

Speaker said, “you’ve come from a long way Upstream, haven’t you?”

Rider leaned towards Stone. “We can tell. And not just because you look different. Even your language has drifted away from ours, significantly. It’s really quite precise; we’ve even put together a map of the Upstream — schematically, anyway — based on lan-guage drift... You’ve diverged a long way from us, you see. Since The Crash. The further Upstream the more isolated the communities are, and the more diverse the adaptation. Nothing can pass Upstream — not even information — so adaptations, language dis-tortions, genetic changes, can only propagate Down-stream. We’re closer to the original form than you are — more of a mix, you see —”

Stone scowled. “*Original form?*” He, and Flower-of-Bones, were the original form. Of course they were; everyone at home had known that. “What are you talking about?”

Speaker sighed. “We don’t know much about our origins. We know there was a Crash — a ship came here, from somewhere else, and fell into this Stream-world ... Humans were scattered all along the Floor, and left to cling to the rock for their lives. But that’s the sum of our knowledge. All we really know is that *humans don’t belong here*. That’s why we’re going Downstream.”

Flower was wide-eyed. “Downstream? In this larva? How far?”

Speaker touched her cheek. “As far as it takes. Forever, perhaps.”

Rider said, “maybe the Stream doesn’t go on forever. How could it be infinite, after all? Perhaps it circles back on itself, like a huge wheel, so that Downstream at last becomes Upstream... Think of that.”

“Or,” Speaker said, “there may be twin singulari-ties — a black hole at the far Downstream, feeding a wormhole which —”

“I don’t know what those words mean,” Stone said, embarrassed. He pressed his hands flat against the larva’s flesh. *To have tamed a larva...* “Speaker,” he said slowly. “Can this larva take us Upstream?”

She studied him, the age lines around her eyes softened by the diffuse lichen-light; she wore her hair tied back behind her neck. “We can’t take you home. I’m sorry.”

Flower wriggled past the women and grabbed Stone’s hand. Her face was shining. “Stone, let’s stay with them.”



Rider touched their shoulders, embracing them both. “Come with us; let’s fly with this larva into the Downstream. The Upstream’s gone...but at least we can find out what’s at the end of it all.”

“Can we, Stone? Oh, can we?”

Stone stared beyond the larva’s thin flesh — beyond the net farm, and into the lost infinity of Upstream.

“I’ll always love you,” he whispered.

Then he turned Downstream. And smiled.