

GORDON GROSS

COMMUNION

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Like most writers, Gordon Gross is two people. But unlike most writers, Gordon Gross is literally two people: husband and wife writing team Eve Gordon and Harold Gross. "Communion" is their first story sale.

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They currently earn their living in the computer field as consultants and troubleshooters. Harold is a professional actor and Eve does stand-up comedy. They live in a New York City apartment too small for them, their two cats, and their collection of 2,000 books.

MON (Middle Of Nowhere) spins slowly on our view screen. After four and a half years together in Stardust, we are finally here. I glance at Glim, seated in the second navnet he had jury-rigged before we left Zehabus, watching the view screen. (an odd word, jury-rigged; as if anyone could "rig" a jury.)

I feel the warm wisp of Glim's Telen disturb my mental wandering.

And they said it couldn't be done, is his thought, so easy in my mind that it could be my own. He continues to watch the view screen, solemn and straight-faced on the outside. All this time tripping over each other physically and mentally, and his humor still takes me by surprise.

I smile, the comers of my mouth resisting my attempt at seriousness. My eyes widen in a telepath's shrug.

Who knew? is my reply.

Glim tums his head slowly to look at me. We did.

Yes, we did, I think to myself, and here we are, still mentally sound. You ready to go in? I ask.

He glances at the view screen again, t hen leans over and touches my cheek. Our minds slide together and intertwine with the caress. Let's get it over with, he replies. I wonder, will we be able to enjoy the physical ease with each other that we've become accustomed to on the voyage? Or will the telepath taboos be too strong here? (Gods, life was easier as a navigator.) Who would ever have thought that just holding hands could be so important? Glim leans back in his chair, and our minds slide apart as two seas separated by a rising island.

"Stardust to MON," I hail the controller. Glim's daily voice exercises may not have improved the raspy quality of my voice, but they ensure that my vocal cords do not weaken and atrophy over long voyages.

"MON, Mooney here," comes the answer.

"Request permission to land."

"Do you have your Trans-immigration request?"

I transmit our files to his system.

"Residence petition, Institute ratings, and immunology records seem in order," Mooney's voice comes over the corn after a few moments. "You are on manual approach. No fancy CyberNav equip here." No questions as to why there are two of us in a one-person scout. Or why telepaths would arrive without the pomp and circumstance of a full cruiser-class cybership. Perhaps our reputation precedes us?

"Affirmative, not a problem," I reply. "Give me the coords."

The computer blinks as it receives the data and vectors. A course appears in a luminescent web superimposed over MON on the view screen.

"Coming in now, half blast." I tell him.

"Confirmed. See you on the ground."

The landing goes relatively smoothly (read: I didn't blow us up); after all, I was a navigator before my Great, if late, Discovery. We touch down a bit on the heavy side, though. Glim shoots a sidelong smile at me.

It's been better than seven years since I've had to land anything besides you, I say. And any respectable planet has at least rudimentary CyberNav.

Did I say anything?

You were thinking it, Glim.

I just thought you were making sure I was awake.

I power down the control chairs' gravity nets, and we make our way to the hatch. Glim looks cool and unruffled, the Diplomat training a warrior of his blood and rank receives holding him in good stead. I could use a shower and a change of clothes after my adequate yet less than delicate landing, but there is no time. I enter the code sequence into the remote panel to the left of the hatch; the hatch slides open.

A tickle of cool Telen in my mind, and a breath of air from the planet washes over us; the hair on the back of my neck prickles as if i am charged with electricity. Outside I see the ground crew pushing a wheeled ramp out of she Control Complex over the glassine landing surface to us.

I guess we won't have to jump, I say.

Be nice, is Glim's response. We knew they were small. Remember, that's why we came.

I know, I say, but small doesn't always mean primitive. A beat. Don't even think

it, I say, looking up at him cutting short a stream of visual puns.

Watching the cloud's reflections in the complex windows, I reach out instinctively for Glim's hand, but my fingers close on air. A glance in his direction; his eyes hold a sad smile. I begin to brood over our emigration to this place and our quest for a place where we can openly acknowledge our relationship. Without censure. After four and a half years shut in the Stardust,

I can't go back to hiding my feelings for Glim. But here we are in the middle of nowhere, the restrictions of the real world slamming back into place, and I must. At least until we know that we'll be welcomed-- as we are.

The ramp connects with the side of the Stardust with a thud bringing me back to real time. We descend, Glim one step in front of me, making up for some of our height difference. Five colonists have come out of the Complex and stand at the bottom of the ramp, waiting for us.

I savor each step. After only calisthenics in gravity fields on the Stardust, real forward motion seems a luxury. At the bottom we face the welcoming party, three women, one man wearing an ceo-mask, and a Calcedon. The ground crew disappears back into the Complex. Unexpectedly, the Telen twists sharply in my mind and then withdraws.

"Well come," says the youngest of the three women. Youth is relative, though. She is taller than I, but shorter than Glim, dark hair threaded with gray.

"I'm Madrin, Colony Regent and Telepist."

"Well met," responds Glim, bowing slightly, palms open at his side in the traditional telepath greeting, his trained voice buoying out in rich waves. "I am Glimmer, and this is Jude."

"Well met." I make a gravelly echo of Glim and mirror the distant handshake society has imposed on telepaths out of superstition and ignorance that we telepaths have adopted out of fear and habit. As if telepaths are so many batteries that can be linked via a handshake and used to control others. As if we would ever want to. As if we could link up without a Monitor anyway. I feel the odd Telen again. It does not feel like it comes from those standing in front of us. I resist the impulse to look over my shoulder.

Madrin smiles widely, revealing straight, white, pointed teeth. Not fully human, I note to myself, at least part Cenavish. "We are happy to have you here," she says. "We finally have enough telepaths for a proper jury."

"Not that we have a crime problem," says one of the other women, sharply.

"Of course, we don't," soothes the third. "But with six jurors, MON can file for full emerging planetary status now."

"Our other telepaths," says Madrin, a sweep of her arm taking in the four by her side. "This is Eileen," she says, indicating the woman who qualified MON's crime rate, and then, gesturing toward the other woman, "and her twin Serba."

A close look at the two women reveals Kin blood. Both share the peach-colored skin and translucent hair, robbed by age of its golden hue. They are dressed differently, Eileen in an elegant blue jump suit that would look better on a younger person, Serbs in a white shirt and drab olive pants.

"Twins," I say, stunned.

Serbs smiles warmly. "Not something you see every day," she says.

"No," I respond. Perhaps, I think to myself, we will fit in here.

"And this is Homar," says Madrin, nodding toward the Calcedorn. (Never point at a Calcedorn, my mother always said.)

"Eemonchdad," he greets us, and bows slightly. He is taller than Glim, his robe only barely revealing his thin sharp form beneath. Most speculations are of exoskeletons. But few Calcedorns have revealed anything more than their robed form, an occasional eye-stalk and one rumored, though suspect, case of an articulated claw. What could we learn if he opens his mind?

We obviously aren't alone here in our search for solitude and acceptance.

"Habnidad," Glim and I say in unison, returning the bow.

Telepathy is a yoke I bear not lightly, he says. His mind voice is heavy and harsh, discomfoting to feel. Underneath it, around it, behind it, I still feel the touch of the other like a cool draft beneath a door.

That is understandable, responds Glim.

"And the last of our telepaths is Eckart," says Madrin, waving in the direction of the masked man in her party. His skin is a patchwork of light-colored blotches on a swarthy background. I do not recognize his race.

"How are you?" he asks, the mask adding a congested quality to his voice.

"Fine, thank you," I say.

"Glad to have you," he says.

"Let us show you our colony," says Madrin, gesturing off to a small transport. It is an old model ZPR, but I resist comment. We came to be out of the mainstream, I had better start accepting all that that decision implies.

"We would be honored," bows Glim, ever the diplomat.

In the zipper, Elleen stands to the fore and stares at Glim who sits in the bucket of the craft with Madrin. I don't blame her for staring. Glim is a perfect blend of his mixed blood. The Japanese is reflected in the cast of his dark eyes and in his long straight, blue-black hair. He has the height and the fine build of his Zehabi mother. And his skin is flawlessly Kin.

Elleen has difficulty sometimes resigning herself to our age and circumstance, says Serba, coming to stand next to me at a side port. Her mind voice is feather

light, a bright trill in my mind.

Excuse me? I say.

Being twins, she explains, makes it painful for us to be too far apart physically. Also we suffer from agapoma. Meaning we do not age normally, but at an accelerated rate.

I'm sorry, I say. How old are you?

Sixteen Kin Standard, she says. Going on thirty-two. And you?

Thirty-one Earth Standard.

That would make us contemporaries, at least for a short time, she laughs crinkling her eyes, and then sensing my discomfort, We are thirty-four Earth Standard. A beat. Unlike Eileen, I accept our age. There is nothing I can do about it. Unfortunately for Eileen, however, intellectual age is not accelerated. She sometimes is quite juvenile. Another beat. I, on the other hand, am always juvenile. I find it is best to remain young at heart, especially when one's heart is no longer young.

Are you full Kin then? I ask. I had heard that . . . Kin could not . . . were not . . .

Such delicacy, she says. It's true Monitors born to our race dwindle to the point of extinction. Few Kin can stand to mate with our own kind.

Then how? I ask.

How did you and Glimmer share a scout for four and a half years? she asks in riposte. I shrug, looking away from her and out the portal next to me, not yet wanting to broach that particular subject and possible rejection.

"Look," says Serba aloud, pointing below the zipper. "There is the Pool."

Beneath us, a body of water lies nestled in the countryside. Its silvery surface only slightly rippled by the children and adults playing around its edges. Two zippers equally as aged as this one rest in a cleared area. The window of the zipper reflects our faces over the picnic scenes below. Mine, basic black, straight horn Mohan, Earth's first colony, next to Serba's flawless peach. If I have any Kin blood mine, which obviously I must, its color is lost in the darkness of my skin. Although I have the coloring and some Mohanish features -- broad nose, wide lips, kinky hair -- I am too thin to be considered attractive by Mohanish standards. I do not have the wide hips and big breasts so celebrated in our literature and media. Looking at Serba, I see my build could have come to me with the telepathy in the elusive blood of the Kin. I do not know.

"The 'Pool'?"

"It seems to be some sort of gateway to the Ellysians," she says.

"Gateway? I thought the Ellysians were either long dead or visitors long gone from MON. Weren't they only survived by a handful of artifacts, not even any

buildings?" I turn my head to look back at the Pool and see a flash of orange and black and white. Fluid for a moment. Then it's gone.

"True. Personally, I think they were this planet's aborigines, not simply explorers, but that they now live a strictly spiritual existence. An existence we can contact through the Pool."

"Oh please," Eileen jumps in. "Don't start that mystic Cranterism. The Pool simply induces some form of narcopathic response in telepaths. It's probably what destroyed the Ellysians in the first place."

Madrin intercedes as Serba blushes purple at her sister. "There isn't much for a telepath to do here," she says, pointedly eyeing the twins, "except discuss some of our planet's more interesting aspects. I hope that Glimmer and you will join us in such mental acrobatics."

"Acrobatics of any sort would be welcome after so long traveling in a scout," Glim chimes in, quickly ending the conversation with a well-placed banality that requires no response.

"Glim has had Diplomat training," I offer Serbs after a bit and after Eileen settles back into her hungry stare. Damn Glim if he isn't quietly reveling in it.

"Good," she responds. "And you?"

"No, I was a navigator before Discovery."

"A navigator?"

"I was twenty-two before the telepathy exhibited itself."

"A PAT-Ey. They say the late ones are the strongest," she says. I shrug my shoulders, suppressing a shudder at the old moniker. Post-Adolescent Telepathic Emergence. It was amazing how even telepaths can be so cruel in a school environment. I was a PAT-E cake, the men Beef PAT-Es. The teasing I took in the high school showers was preferable even when it became apparent that my breasts and hips would never achieve the Mohanish ideal. Children can be forgiven, but even the weakest Tel-child knows when they are hurting someone. "How did you meet Glimmer?"

"At the beginning of my second year as a juror," I say. "On Zehabus, Halbus II sector. It was a slander suit. It took forty-two days to decide the case."

"Forty-two days?" Serba echoes incredulously.

"The plaintiff was very . . . unlikable," I explain.

"And you say Glimmer is the one who has Diplomat training?"

"The trial proved to be a learning experience," I reply. Most of my cases until that point had been violent crimes, ones where opinion and perception played

an
inconsequential role.

"So how did the two of you survive your voyage without killing each other?"

I look away from her again. Glim is in deep conversation with Madrin. When I face Serba again, she is still watching me.

How is it possible for you and Eileen to be full Kin if your Monitors are extinct? I try to head off the questions about Glim and me. Have you perfected disrupter fields?

Diplomacy forgotten, she takes the direct route, she laughs. Our Monitors are rare, not extinct. And disrupters are not yet . . . effective for the Kin despite the hope that they would be. But that is of no consequence. My father is static. You would say, non-telepathic. A well-adjusted man, despite his handicap. A Monitor wasn't necessary to protect my parents during, uh, physical contact.

Oh. I can think of no other response. Monitors are an important part of most telepaths' lives. They can dampen or amplify other telepaths' abilities, weave together several telepaths' abilities, or even break into a shielded mind, should it be necessary.

What does a race do if it can no longer touch? As long as the sentient universe has been aware of the Kin, the race's population, though extraordinarily long-lived, has been dwindling. Non-related Kin can barely stand in the same room together; their aversion to physical contact with their own kind is legendary.

Telepaths of other races avoid physical contact with each other for more concrete reasons. Glim and I are the only case I know of where simple telepaths don't go mad or into psychic shock when they meld without benefit of a Monitor.

Non-Kin races won't die out like the Kin anytime soon, though. The "static" population makes up the majority of the universe; for the time being, at least.

What about the Calcedorn?

Homar? she asks. It may be Kin blood. At the look in my eyes, she crinkles her own and continues, Nor like that. Two or three centuries ago the Calcedorns were playing with genetic engineering. They asked for Kin samples. It could be that or their race could be starting to spontaneously produce its own telepaths. I haven't heard of any besides Homar though.

Eckart, she continues without any prompting from me, is actually from Earth.

Earth? I echo, shocked.

It's not impossible to get to Earth, Serba says, although the xenophobia does make it . . . trying.

"Trying?" I say.

She smiles. Okay, dangerous for an alien. Although a Kin can pass. It's clear

that Eckart's got Kin blood as well as Earth blood, but it's caused his skin discoloration as well as some other over-sensitivities to the environment. Bluntly, it's not something he can easily hide on Earth. I suppose it was easier to leave than stay.

Is that why you and Eileen are, here?

We are all misfits here of one sort or another. What about you and Glimmer? What brings you to our backwater?

The usual reasons, I say.

The usual reasons, my foot, she replies. Please, I may be a genetic abomination, but that doesn't make me an idiot. The odds of two non-Tels surviving that long together on a scout are astronomical; the odds of two telepaths doing it are incalculable.

I do not respond, but I can see the momentary glint of -- what? comprehension, disapproval, revulsion? Then it is hidden. Serba appears to be an accomplished diplomat herself.

I turn to watch Madrin refereeing a match of mind wrestling between Glim and Eckart. Ah, the smell of testosterone is in the air, and Eileen is breathing deeply. I don't like her sniffing at Glim like he's a cake in a bakery.

Glim shouts out "Three five nine." By the look on Eckart's face I can guess that Glim had successfully gotten the number out from behind his shield. Madrin awards Glim the point. It brings back memories of training.

I was serving as Assistant Navigator on the VanderTol, a luxury goods frigate, the first year of my second three-year contract. Very soon after I made the Great Discovery ("Captain, I think I'm telepathic"), I was dropped at the Institute on Zehabus, not because it was the best, although it was, but because it was the next stop on the ship's route.

I was officially Tested and officially Confirmed. My career as a navigator was legally terminated, my contract paid off by the Institute, and my life as a telepath begun.

The course work was straightforward. Learn to control your mind. Shield against unwanted "noise"; keep your thoughts to yourself. Weeks of moot court. Memorize the rules.

Telepaths must spend no less than four, but no more than twenty years serving as jurors, travel time not included, in a Court certified by the Interplanetary Department of Justice. Of course, the alternative was permanent observation and control by the IDJ in a location convenient for them, generally in one of their detention centers.

Three months after Discovery, I was a juror.

The zipper, having left the Pool behind, flies over the main colony. It is a small one. Four buildings clustered around a village green are all that is visible from the zipper.

"Most of the colony is beneath the green," Serba explains.

"Didn't they learn from Earth that people weren't meant to live underground?"

"They don't stay there," she replies. "There are crops to be cared for and business to attend to, not to mention all the festivals and holiday celebrations that take place on the green."

"Farming?" I ask.

"Yes," she responds, "the fields are over there. The colony actually extends under the more delicate crops so that the radiated heat will protect them at night." She points to the other side of the zipper. Through the window, I can make out the patchwork of distant fields and one above-ground building. "Livestock is kept on the other side of the fields. It cuts down on the smell."

A small way from the main colony, perhaps a thirty-minute walk, is the Justice building, an elegant name for a simple one-story granite structure and the central body of authority on MON. From here, blocked only by a thin line of trees, I see the few above-ground colony structures and the beginning of the fields. The oh-so-mysterious Pool that sparked Elleen and Serbs is a shimmer in the distance. Further yet, and getting farther behind every moment, is what has been home for the last four plus years. Madrin lands the zipper on the pad next to the building I feel just a hit exposed standing beside the zipper. Getting inside will be welcome.

We walk toward the oversized doors, oddly ornate in contrast with the plain facade. Eckart walks up to pace with me. "What do you think?"

"They're intriguing." I momentarily halt my rush toward the safety of the building to study them more closely. "I recognize many of the symbols and stories, but not all. They're very well carved." Eckart smiles and starts inside the building,

"You just made his day. They were his project," Madrin whispers to me as she passes into the building. I suppose being stuck inside so often gave Eckart time to pursue other talents. With a final appreciative glance I enter the sheltering waifs of the Justice building:

Inside of the structure in the back, there is bench seating for witnesses and spectators. At the front are the Judge's and Jury's boxes. Facing the J's are the boxes for plaintiff and defendant All is simply wrought; the structure seems cool without being cold. The piercing gaze of Lady Justice presides over the room from behind the judge's box.

"You'll be spending little of your time here," starts Madrin, "but it is the center of MON Justice. We also house the Ellysian artifacts here --what few we have. More immediately, though, I am sure you wish to rest. Out this way are the Telepath cottages." She starts out of the hall and leads us to a back door that is far less impressive than where we entered.

The clean air of MON wraps me again. For a moment the odd Telen tickles my mind.

I turn to Glim but he is not sending to me, and no one else is being obvious about it. My shield may be a bit weak; after all Glim and I didn't need to use shields all that much over the last four years. In the distance is a copse of orange-leaved trees striking against the turquoise sky. We start toward them, the rest of the Tels allowing Glim and me a chance to absorb the scenery.

The housing for the telepaths is another twenty-minute walk beyond the Justice building just the other side of the trees. At present, there are six aboveground cottages, a powerful example of the separate but equal treatment that telepaths often receive at the hands of non-Tels. Each is positioned to afford privacy, but all within sight of each other.

Madrin goes with Glim, and Serbs escorts me to my cottage. Perhaps Serbs is not the only one who is unaware of our reputation.

Serbs, I send.

Yes?

Why are the telepaths housed aboveground if the non-Tel population is housed below it? I ask.

We would have little reason to come aboveground otherwise, she replies. Elleen was right in her statement that crime is no problem here.

Oh, I say, not convinced, but it's a better party line than I've heard in the past.

My cottage is cozy although the jurors I worked with on Zehabus would have called it crowded. The structure is made of a material that I am sure is not indigenous to MON, but is made to look like natural wood and mud. A cotton batting mattress in the bedroom on a platform bed, a small kitchen complete with foodporter, a bath area with a huge sunken bath, a living area with a small fireplace, a compact workspace with Plex-Link(R). Not bad for a start-up colony.

Glim comes to me after Serbs leaves.

At least there's indoor plumbing, I say.

You are incorrigible, he says, the feel of his Telen warming me. So little time apart and I have missed our contact already.

I was trained to expect technology, I remind him.

As I was raised to expect luxury, he replies.

Touche.

Did you see the Pool?

Yes. Serba says she thinks it's a gateway to the Ellysians. Elleen, however, disagrees.

I seem to recall. Madrin didn't volunteer an opinion.

Serba says she thinks that they are the planet's aborigines.

Interesting, says Glim. Then, Madrin says that the crew will off-load our belongings and revive Tikki from stasis. They should bring our things by later today. The thought of Tikki, my gen-cat, back underfoot brings a smile to my face.

Why don't you get a shower in the meantime, Glim says. He knows me too well.

I'll do that.

Come by when you're done, he says. Perhaps I can give you reason for another one.

A bath, a real bath in real water, the first in too many years, is the first genuine straightforward pleasure for me on MON. I rub in lotion and let the air dry the excess moisture off me. The light floral scent of the lotion is unusual, most likely indigenous, definitely new, to me. Looking in the full-length mirror in the bathing area, I see that regular exercise has helped me keep my shape (thin), but more than four years without sun has not lightened the color of my skin. The even ebony glistens darkly with oil and water in the slightly bluet light of MON's unfamiliar sun.

There is a brightly colored cotton-like robe hanging in the closet of the sleeping area. I put it on when my skin is dry and walk barefoot toward Glim's cottage. The ground is soft and slightly damp against the soles of my feet. The grass is a dark blue-green, and it's dotted with small turquoise flowers.

Out under the sky, that cool whip of Telen flutters again. It seems to come from the direction of the main colony, but when I turn to look in that direction, the touch shifts. I concentrate, listening carefully, but I can discern no meaning just a slight pull, a caress, a whisper, a kiss. Either someone skilled is playing this game or I am losing my touch. Normally I can immediately sense direction from a touch. I close my eyes and try to focus on that slender cool thread of thought, try to resolve its meaning and direction.

While I am circling slowly, trying to get a fix on the mind touch, Glim comes up behind me.

Do you feel it? I ask.

Yes.

Where is it coming from? I ask, turning to face him.

He shrugs.

What is it saying? Can you understand it?

No, he says.

Do they have a Monitor here? I ask.

No, he replies. According to Madrin, they haven't been able to afford that status.

Then what is it? I ask.

Glim shakes his head. I don't know.

What does it mean?

I don't know, Jude. That's all I can say. He pounds that last thought into my mind with a bit more fervor than necessary.

Okay, I apologize. Sony. I reach down and pick one of the tiny blue flowers. The scent is sweet like a Mohanish apricot. I hold it up for Glim to smell.

Nice, he says, noncommittal. I can tell the unidentified Telen is irritating him. Young Monitors often play this sort of game, a sort of mental ventriloquism, before they mature and are trained. Maybe MaN has birthed its own Monitor.

If mental arts are not wholly welcome here, a child could learn to hide its gift for quite some time. This is true especially if the parents are aware and helping with the deceit. While such deceit is a crime, few can blame parents for not wanting to send their children away at so young an age.

Cueing from Glim's tension, I decide to occupy him rather than pursue the source of the Telen. This place reminds me of Mohan, I say. Of course, Mohan has a lot more people. And they're all dark.

Not to mention that they have CyberNav equipment, Glim chips in.

I wasn't actually going to mention it, I say. Glim studiously offers no response. I have to admit, it is beautiful here. And they certainly went out of their way to provide telepaths with privacy. Glim nods. Don't you like it?

It's different, he answers.

Different? I say.

Kelgar is a desert planet, he reminds me.

I forgot. I've never seen his home planet; as much as I try, I cannot picture

an
entire planet that is a desert. Only the very rich would choose to live on
such
a planet. Kelgar is so exclusive, so sparsely populated, that it doesn't even
have its own Court, but shares one of Zehabus'. It is a constant source of
teasing that he never learned how to swim. Maybe now I will have the time to
make good on my threat to teach him. The Pool seems a perfect place to try. I,
of course, will then have to get over my fear of stepping on living, green,
slimy things in natural ponds. Maybe there is an indoor pool somewhere.

How is your cottage, I ask after a while.

The same as yours, he replies.

Is there a damper? I ask. I didn't think to check my place.

Yes. And I see a little fire light up behind his eyes. The switch is by the
bed.

Ooo, I say. Let's go try it out.

Why is it that when we touch, we do not go insane except with pleasure,
neither
of us is subsumed by the personality of the other, and our minds like our
bodies
fit together with the ease of two puzzle pieces? Why don't the telepists know
how to do this?

It's a good thing we had a 'lectro-Monitor or you would have deafened half the
colony, I jibe Glim. Of course the scratches on his back and ass didn't appear
quietly either.

It was certainly interesting to have room to move around in again. Though I
can't say much for the constraints of gravity. I'll be sore for days.

So will I, but I'm not complaining, I tease him, grabbing his now flaccid
penis.

But I better get back to my cottage before we get caught. Don't want to risk
alienating ourselves in the first few hours.

You don't think they'd buy the fact that you were just giving me a massage? I
send him a few choice images of what I can massage for him and how before he
groans and begs exhaustion. Okay, you're right, Jude. I just don't want to
lose

what we had on the ship. I can't go back to hiding all the time.

Another evening like this and I don't think we'll have a choice. We really do
have to remember we have neighbors now! I slip out of our wet embrace and put
on
the robe. Glim turns off the damper field, and we are thrown into shadowy dusk
as the field's soft yellow glow fades. "I think I'll go enjoy another bath
before dinner. You may want to as well. I don't mind the aroma, but I wouldn't
want to send any nosy females into rut."

"And to whom would you be referring?"

"As if you didn't notice Elleen on the zipper. Or was that Elleen noticing
your
zipper! You, with your archaic throwback fashions."

"A bit territorial, aren't we? Now why would I give up what we have for just some simple Kin-ship?"

I fall back to the bed, laughing at his abysmal pun. It is difficult to get used to being around people again. The Stardust was a closed but complete society. A community of two. And we still have an infinite amount of space to explore in each other's minds.

Serba understated the situation when she said there isn't a lot for a telepath to do on MON. It's no wonder Eckart had time to work on his magnificent doors. Three days. I am unpacked, well fed, and over rested. Tikki, when she is not off ridding the planet of small game, is busy running under my feet. And the wild Telen never seems totally absent from my mind unless I'm in a damping field. I cannot otherwise shield against it.

It may be growing stronger, but it sends no message that I can decipher. Several times I have found myself walking toward the main colony, unthinkingly, and have stopped myself. The compulsion makes me nervous.

Glim seems similarly affected. Madrin says the others felt the same touch for a time after they first arrived and then less and less frequently until it disappeared altogether. Apparently this is the source of the controversy with the Pool. There are many documented phenomena that can cause false Telen, but none ever documented as consistently as this without a satisfactory explanation. Unfortunately, since MON really is in the middle of nowhere (in a physical sense), the phenomenon hasn't been vigorously pursued after the original, inconclusive, investigation dead-ended several years ago.

Glim is drilling the nervousness out of his system with his broadsword in the open area just beyond cottages. The only sounds are his occasional grunts and the elusive avian life of MON which Tikki keeps at bay. I need some distraction as well. Glim can't possibly occupy me all the time. Not that we haven't tried. While there have been some "contact" events at the Pool arranged by Serba, we have politely declined to join for the time being. Though it might give me an excuse to get Glim near an open body of water at least, I'm not quite up to swimming lessons myself yet.

So far, no one has said anything to us about the time Glim and I spend together, and I assume that the damper keeps the full nature of our relationship solely between the two of us, but one never knows. It's better not to push too far too soon.

Serba, I call out.

You rang, comes her reply.

What is there to do?

Nothing, she says. Eileen is in a snit --

Am not -- echoes Elleen's grating Telen.

Homar is molting and can't go out, and Eckart's got a problem with the pollen. So we don't have any contact plans.

You can't tell me that there's nothing to do, I protest.

Harvest, she says. That's it.

Can I help?

You don't have to, she says.

I want to. My belly-button has been over-contemplated.

What?

Sorry. An old philosophy joke. I'm bored.

Okay. I can call Madrin. Maybe, I'll join you.

Thank you.

I put on a loose-fitting wearall and hoots while I wait for Serba. I rinse my mouth with water. I splash cold water on my face, and sit outside and let the sun dry it.

Madrin will send a zipper as soon as one is available.

Thank you, Serba. It just seems that there should be more to do on a planet. I expected to be bored on Stardust, but here . . .

You'll adjust. Serba comes around the comer. "Do you mind if we talk?"

"No. Something wrong?"

"I just don't want Eileen to overhear us. Another drawback to being twins is that it is very hard to close the other out of our thoughts when speaking telepathically. If we used the 'lectro-Mon she would feel the wall like a headache. This is the most . . . diplomatic way to handle it." The smile while she simultaneously crosses her eyes is not convincing.

"Is there a problem between you two?"

"Not between us really. I know you noticed her fascination with Glim as I did. Remember, I told you she is young in mind if not in body. I think your relationship with Glim has her a bit jealous. Even if she knows she couldn't handle any physical contact. Somehow she thinks if you can, she must be able to."

"Relationship?" Trying to play dumb as a telepath requires infinitely more finesse than as a non-Tel. It is also incredibly foolish with your peers. "Is it that obvious?"

"The facts are, but the explanation isn't. How do you two survive it? I mean, with a Monitor it is usually doable, in a rather public sort of way for your species, but without . . . How do you protect each other?"

"We don't. We just let it happen."

"You allow each other in completely? Without any protection ? Without even a disrupter?"

"Yes." It is the truth between Glim and me. Absolutely no barriers when we are in contact.

"What . . ."

"What is it like?"

"Well, yes. I mean, I know it's none of my business, but . . . yes."

I start to laugh and Tikki tries to jump on my lap, knocking me to the ground in the process. Soon she and I are one large mass of sentient protein. Out of breath, I finally pin Tikki by her shoulders and she playfully concedes defeat by throwing her paws out over her head. She opens her mouth and lolls her tongue out to one side.

"That felt so good."

"Nothing like a good wrestle," Serba stands up and gestures toward the Justice building. I let Tikki go, and walk with Serba, the gen-cat bounding in wide circles about us. "Where did you get such a wonderful gen-cat?"

"She was a gift from my parents. I think they were worried I would be alone the rest of my life after I . . . after I was Discovered. It must have cost them a year's salary. I guess they felt guilty for birthing me."

"That's awful."

"I don't mean it that way. I don't blame them. I'm actually proud of who and what I am even if it came with little choice. But I think they have their doubts. Anyway, that's not what I meant. I meant it felt good to talk about Glim and me. And I don't mind you asking. I haven't been able to talk to anyone about it ever. Before we left Zchabus, we were rather avoided. Even my best friends wouldn't talk about it. I think the Institute suggested the transfer to MON just to keep things calm."

"So?"

"So? Oh, what's it like? It's like, well, taking a warm bath that hugs back. It flows through you and fills you. It's like you've turned inside out and you're both part of this incredible organism that's both of us individually but also something wonderfully more. It's . . . indescribable. Here," I send her the imagery and emotion that flood me every time Glim and I make love. It isn't perfect; it doesn't even come close to the ever-changing wonderment that Glim and I share, but it leaves Serba stunned and blushing.

"For something you can't share, you've certainly ripped back the curtain."

"So, what do you tell Eileen?"

"The truth, as if I had a choice. I just hope she lets it go. What you and Glim have sounds . . . unmatched. At least once you get past the concept of two Tels touching, especially in that way. I wonder what makes you two so different?"

"I have no idea, I'm only glad we are:"

The zipper pulls up and we board in silent camaraderie. Watching Serba's back as she walks up the entry, I smile.

Outside, the sun is shining but the temperature is still pleasant in the shade.

I sit down on the bench beside my front door. After a short time (doesn't anyone keep track of time on this planet?), I stand up and scan the sky. No zipper. I am looking forward to being in the fields again today. The work is satisfying and, besides, there isn't a whole lot else to do. Especially since I need to leave Glim a little recovery time.

The few MONEans I've met are pleasant but reserved around me. Whether it's my newness or my Tel status that holds them at bay I cannot yet say. No one is hostile though in thought or deed. Even a non-Tel can pick up strong emotions, observation being a large part of anyone's ability to understand those around them. Tels just have the capacity to confirm and get detail.

Tikki comes trotting up from the field and insinuates herself between my feet.

A light breeze whistles over my cottage, and I hum along with it tunelessly. I take one step toward Glim's cottage, and immediately trip over Tikki, who jumps on me, purring, as soon as I'm on the ground. I wrestle her off me and get up, heading for Glim's place, keeping an ear open for the zipper as I go. The grass brushing against my boots as I walk and Tikki's purr are all I allow to announce my approach and possible ambush.

When I am nearly all the way to Glim's place, I can hear the cut of his broadsword through the air, his voice counting. I walk around his cottage and see him before he senses me and turns. He is covered with sweat, wearing only a pair of shorts. I smile. Tikki storms him, sword play being one of her favorite games, but he throws the sword down before she reaches him, Tikki goes and sits by the sword, attention divided between it and Glim.

I thought you were going to help with the harvest, he says, ignoring Tikki.

If the zipper ever comes.

Always so impatient, he says.

It comes from years of having to be someplace on schedule, I respond. You're just used to letting everything take forever.

Jurors learn that everything happens in its own time.

I send him a mental raspberry. You've only been a juror for five point two six years longer than I have; Earth-standard at that. Your problem is you've got too much money.

Not anymore, he reminds me. How he can be so -- mild-- about it still dumbfounds me.

Are you sure it was worth giving up? I ask.

What we have together is worth any price, he responds, walking toward me. I only wish we could live without having to hide it out here on the edge of the universe. There are places I would love to share with you.

But any place I am with you is perfect. I smile up at him.

Glim cups my face in his hands for the first time since we've landed without the numbing edges of a damper field around us, and time seems to shift and blur. I smell his sweat mingled with the MONEan flowers in an impressionistic symphony.

Our minds surf together in a wave, and I open my lips to kiss him . . . the world explodes in an orange and black and white flash of light and the screaming

and I see them floating in the black and orange -two of them, they must be the Ellysians, I think --long hair floating behind them, androgynous in form and Glim's mind and mine embrace and I can feel the power in the joining grow and I

feel the others, Serba and Eileen and Eckart and Homar, trying to separate us with their minds and flinching from the assault and I see MON through a black veil and-- how can the spiritual bond between Glim and me be this strong? What has happened? Why has it not happened before? How could I ever give this up? How

could anyone ask me to deny it?. -- then Tikki is between my feet and I am falling and Glim tries to hold me but Tikki is between us, he loses touch, and the bond is broken.

I fall on my back, jamming my shoulder, and Tikki jumps on me, purring and robbing her face against my chin. The colors are gone. The screaming has stopped.

What in the living hell was that? Serba demands.

I look up at Glim. He is staring at his hands.

The others are coming, I say. Are you all right?

He looks up from his hands. Are you all right? I ask again.

What happened? he asks. His question sparkles in my mind with shock and wonder.

I shake my head. I don't know. Are you okay?

It was so powerful, he says. Like we were fusing into one --

Are you okay? I shoot at him, worrying about personality subsumption.

Yes, he says, finally. Not subsumption. Mind sex.

I can see the others, the Calcedorn in the lead, coming around the corner of Glim's cottage. Tikki settles down on my chest with her paws snuggled into my neck, the tips of her claws prickling against the surface of my skin.

"What happened?" demands Serba, stopping several feet from me. The others stand a little way from her. No one moves to help me shake off Tikki. I wrestle Tikki off and slowly stand up. No one attempts to help me at all.

"What happened?" Serba repeats.

"I don't know," I say. "Everything was black and orange, and they were floating."

I turn toward the main colony and sense that Glim follows my gaze.

"The Ellysians," she says. "You saw the Ellysians. But how could you see them here? We've only seen them at the Pool."

"You never told me you'd seen them before."

"I didn't want to influence you. It Eileen and the scientists are right, and it is simply a 'narco-pathic response to elements unknown,' I could influence your perceptions by giving you expectations."

I feel as if the blood has been drained from my body. Glim may be right. Although the term doesn't describe the experience itself, "mind sex" is the best description the feeling left in its wake. "You could never have suggested what we just saw and felt."

"Never," Glim chimes in. His nipples are still hard from the experience, his body flushed. He sits down quickly, knees drawn up in an effort to hide his excitement.

Serba, however, is too intent on me to notice or care. "What did you see?" Her level of passion is almost fanatical.

"I, we, saw two beings. I didn't get a sense of male or female. They had long hair of some sort that appeared to have motion or they were in some kind of nul-grav field. There were colors: black and orange. A sense of . . . of . . . welcome? Is that what you would call it, Glim?"

"I didn't feel anything. I saw what you saw, but we share all our senses when we're joined, uh, linked mentally."

Glim is actually flustered. I have never seen him off balance before.

"Your 'link' was most extraordinary," Homar interjects. His molting must not be finished; a fine trail of particles marks the path from his cottage. I find myself musing again over the nature of his physical being. "Is this what you two normally experience during your mating process?"

Thus Homar brings Glim's and my relationship to the table, albeit in a less than tactful manner. Glim, all sign of embarrassment gone, stands to confront Homar.

"I don't believe we have invited you into our hive."

Homar goes rigid for a moment, the insult stunning him. "Actually," he answers, calmly precise, "as you have already shared your feast, we are no longer strangers on the path to your hive."

Glim finally bows in assent and responds, "Andadmonee, Sic Homar, then allow me to show you the proper entry."

"You know my people's customs well, Glimmer. But know, too, that what has happened here today is extraordinary; so much so that it draws me out at a time when no other, certainly no other of an alien race, may expect to see me. That being said, let us end our sparring. I think we are both vulnerable at the present moment." Homar gestures behind him, and Glim notices for the first time the trail of the airborne particles.

"Very well."

"So you both saw the same things," Eckart jumps in, promptly sneezing. "I'm sorry, I ran out without my eco-mask."

"Didn't we just clear your sinuses for you?" I look at Eckart holding his palm over his nose. I begin to giggle.

"This is not something to laugh about!" Eileen is darkly flushed with rage. "You two blasted all of us with something you had no right to inflict."

"Calm down, Eileen," Serba cuts off her tirade with a command. "I'm sure it wasn't intentional, and I don't think it caused any damage, however shocking it may have been. Your problem is you're jealous. It's time to grow up. Worry about the welfare of the jury for once."

In the distance we hear a zipper closing in on us from the direction of the main colony. As it comes over the trees I can see Madrin's strained face in the window. Please, all of you, I will be there in a moment. I think we need to talk, calmly, about whatever just happened.

Glim takes this time to re-don his shirt and sheathe his sword. Simple tasks give him a sense of order and stability. On the Stardust he would wash every day in precisely the same way. Glim uses ritual to channel his emotions and energy.

He would never yell at me for calling up supplies from the food porter in a different order, juice before coffee, toppings before toast. Nor would he remark if I set them out on the table in a haphazard manner. He would simply reorder

each into its customary place, touching an item at a time, lips murmuring quietly.

I didn't find out until the end of the voyage that the order he imposed was an integral part of the Zehabi ritual of thanksgiving. And I only found out because I asked, not because he ever called me to task for my little game of disorder.

The zipper lands, and Madrin walks over, gravely concentrating on our jury. I feel slightly bewildered and guilty like an adolescent after she first learns to masturbate.

"I think, perhaps, we should all sit. Homar," she notes the Calcedorn's unprecedented public appearance with no outward sign of shock, "are you comfortable enough to stay with us? Do you need anything in your present condition to remain here?"

"I am content at the moment. I imagine this morning's events overshadow even the occasion of my present exposure."

We follow Madrin over to a copse of MON's percasive orangish-leafed trees. We sit in a circle with Glim and me at opposite points of a diameter. Madrin settles on a large stone. We look for all the galaxy like a troop of campers about to hear a ghost story. "We had all heard the rumor, of course, that Jude and Glim were not only gifted telepaths, but also distinctive in their interaction with each other. But we were not warned of the effect this could have on the rest of our jury."

"Madrin," Glim answers, "this has never happened before. We do try to keep our physical contact within the constraints of a damping field, but we have touched, kissed, even been intimate on the rare occasion outside of it. In the past, neither we nor nearby telepaths have had this . . . reaction."

"It's the Pool," Elleen states.

"I don't know what caused it," I say. "But it was unexpected. Glim and I were ambushed as much as the rest of you."

"That being the case, I believe a certain amount of restraint would be prudent for now. Perhaps one of you is developing into a Monitor. For all our sakes, I think, for now, you two should cease all physical contact."

As Madrin pronounces her verdict, I feel my dreams shred and float away on the wind. All reason for our self-imposed exodus, all hope for the freedom to build a new life is lost. I call to Tikki and run back into my cottage. Locking the door, I draw a near-scalding bath and sink into it crying. I hear knocking at the door and feel an occasional tentative Telen, but I ignore them all and sink into my tears and mist.

I wake to a tapping at the door. My eyes are swollen, and the sunlight paints the inside of my eyelids fire-red. Go away, I send, putting as much bite in my Telen as I can muster.

Never, comes the answer, warm and soothing in my mind. Glim. Jude.

I cannot answer.

Jude, please, we need to talk. I roll over onto Tikki who makes an unenthusiastic pillow; she mewls her complaint at me, then wriggles out and off the bed.

Jude, I know you're a wake. We need to talk. Things are not as bad as you think they are. Much has happened since you . . . left. Dear Glim, always the diplomat, when he isn't slicing and dicing.

I put on my robe, my damned MONEan robe, and go to the door.

"What?" I cannot continue in mind speak. It only reminds me of how close we can no longer be. I stare at the slab of wood separating us and wonder how I could even go on separated permanently from Glim. This was not what we risked so much for. Maybe we should simply take off again in Stardust and cruise around until we die. For so long I never believed someone existed with whom I could share my life, from even before Discovery. How could I ever survive happily without what Glim and I have shared?

"May I come in?"

For a moment I really consider just going back to bed alone and curling into a little ball. But this is Glim. Our shared history is powerful. The ostracism of not only our fellow jurors, but of all telepaths on Zehabus. The threats of the planer's most prominent anti-Tel group, SCM, Society for Closed Minds [or SCuM as the Tels think of them]. Four and a half standard years locked together in a cell called Stardust. The dreams of the freedom to acknowledge, publicly, our feelings lot each other.

I owe him more than shutting him out, even now when those dreams are lost. With or without the dream, I love him. "Of course," I capitulate.

I lead him into the kitchen, and we sit at the small table across from each other. My eyes are gritty and my teeth fuzzy. Neither of us speaks.

Glim looks concerned and worried. I want to hold him, and my thoughts come full circle to why we're sitting here on opposite sides of the table rather than holding each other. Finally, "So, what has been decided for us now?" And how can we fight it?

"No, it's our decision, yours and mine. Madrin and I discussed this, rather heatedly at times, for most of the night. I don't think she realized how strongly this would affect us. The entire jury realizes, now, how much we share. But it's possible that we pose some kind of danger or at the very least some serious distraction, if this happens again. So we compromised."

"How?" I ask, wondering what we have lost.

"To begin with, no physical contact outside an enhanced 'lectro-Mon."

"Enhanced how?"

Glim opens his fist and reveals a disrupter. "I've already installed one in my cottage. This is for yours. If you agree."

"But we've never disturbed anyone when we're under a 'lectro-Mon. Why do we need the disrupter?" I protest.

"It's the least Madrin will accept." Glim shrugs. Intellectually, I can understand the condition. Disrupter fields are effective, and most damping fields are installed in the bedroom where they are convenient to privacy and intimacy, if not limiting to spontaneity.

"What else?"

"Madrin will communicate with the closest Institute to notify them that she wants Test us. She thinks that one or both of us may be developing into Monitors. She is confident that the Institute will transmit any materials she needs.

"I have some misgivings; she may be trained as a telepist," Glim says, "but she is not a Monitor herself. I wonder if she is qualified to Test us. I guess we'll find out. I can't imagine that I'm a Monitor, though; if I gambled, my bet would be on you."

"What else?" More testing. I've spent more years in a school environment than anywhere else. First as a child, then a navigator, then a juror, now this. When shall I be free of tests?

"We work with the others on some experiments to learn more about the Ellysians." Glim smiles and spreads his palms. "That's the deal."

"You love to negotiate, don't you," I say. "It's a good thing that it's one of your talents."

"I enjoy it most when the goals are worthy. Now, how would you like to take advantage of some of my other talents?"

With Glim's gaze on me, I become aware of how rumpled I must look. "At least let me rinse my mouth first. There's no telling what life forms are thriving in there."

"Ever the delicate flower," Glim laughs. "Since you've made it so enticing, why don't you just meet me 'neath the 'lectro-Mon?"

A slow grin gets the better of me. "Deal, but I'm not responsible for the condition of your clothes if you're not out of them by the time I get there."

In the bathroom, I rinse my mouth and wash my face. I hear a click and snap as

Glim inserts the disrupter into the 'lectro-Mon. Then the rustle of his clothing. My reflection stares back at me from the mirror, eyes puffy with purplish circles under them. The last time I looked this unrested was right before we left Zehabus when Glim and I received a matched set of death threats from SCUM. That was the moment that finalized our decision to come to MON.

Before I was Discovered, I had a steady life, not many highs, but certainly not many lows either. Life was an even journey.

After Discovery, the regularity of my existence was destroyed. After three months of training and therapy with multitudinous telepists, I was thrown into the most prestigious Court system this side of the galaxy, and trapped in the middle of a juridie melodrama. Murder, armed robbery, piracy, hate crimes. For the first time in my life I wondered about the depravity of sentient life.

Into this mind stepped Glim. Breeding from a long line of rich on Kelgar, he seemed to resonate in my mind even during the first case that we deliberated together. When we first broke taboo and touched-fingertip-to-fingertip, the result was electric. Never before had I anything of any account to lose. But having such a thing now, especially one as taboo as our relationship, I cannot help but fear losing it. And with that fear comes the knowledge that I will pay any price to keep it.

Maybe living alone together in the Stardust isn't such a bad alternative. Once we rate out the possibility of sunlight, fresh air, and unconstricted movement, a diet of love seems all we could possibly need.

Glim is waiting for me when I get to the bedroom. The soft yellow glow of the 'lectro-Mon bathes him and the room around him with an ethereal light. His nearly hairless chest, solid and chiseled, seems to float above the edge of the covers.

I go to him, stiff from last night's protest, but needing his warmth and encouragement. I pass through the field, slipping out of the robe, reaching out with my Telen, and . . . nothing. I fall in to his arms and feel my skin against his, his lips in my hair, his penis against my thigh, but I am trapped within my own mind, I cannot embrace his.

Like this, making love is just jamming.

But it's all we have left.

The justice building is cool inside its granite cocoon. We walk through a corridor that skirts the court-room. Serba leads the way, Madrin separates Glim and me in the line, and Elleen picks up the rear. Serba stops at a carved door. The sign simply says ARCHIVES. Understated for the only collection of Ellysian artifacts in the known universe.

Once humans joined the galactic community, they ceased their "sticky fingers" approach to archeology. Few inhabitable worlds are void of the signs of prior civilization. Humans adopted the habit of other sentient explorers, they

collect artifacts into archives and museums local to their site of discovery where such can be viewed in context. The more spectacular discoveries are connected by regular touring ships.

Scientists and others with interest in sites off the established tours can request an information dump to gain data on smaller or private sights. If the researcher requires first-hand observations; however, he or she has three choices: book passage on one of the cyberfrigates on the appropriate trade route (a long and time consuming option); charter a transport to the desired location (an expensive, but more direct option for those with no flight expertise); or take a personal scout (the most exorbitant option for those who can survive on their own in space).

The system, such as it is, does not engender much contact with remote locations like MON. When taking on such great expense, one would like to get results somewhat in proportion to the outlay.

Serba opens the door, and we enter a dimly lit room. A sneeze draws my attention to Eckart who sits in front of a viewing screen. "Please, shut the door quickly. The pollen is rather thick today," he says in a nasally apologetic way while reaching for his trademark mask on the table next to him. "I'm doing some research for my next project -- a statue for the center Green," he says by way of polite dismissal as he returns to the viewer.

On the other side of the room are several small file containers and a single display case. Inside the case, highlighted in tiny pools of spotlights, are five . . . things. "What could these possibly be?"

Serba looks up with a misty-eyed reverence, "We don't know. The theories range from farming handtools to pieces of larger machinery. They were all found near the banks of the Pool or within its historical shoreline."

Each piece looks as if a giant hand has twisted it into a bizarre contortion. How would the Ellysians have used them? Did they hold them in their hands? Did Ellysians have hands? Every edge is rounded, and each piece mottled in color. Were the artifacts damaged in some way by some unknown cataclysm -- or were they constructed so? Nothing about their shapes suggests the images Glim and I saw.

Glim's voice breaks my concentration, "I wonder if the Ellysians were blasted out of existence? All of these pieces look like the leftovers of a plasma-blast."

Madrin fields the question. "That has been discussed among the academics. Unfortunately, geologists can't find any corroborating geologic data, so they favor the theory that these objects are as originally designed. The next most common theory is that they were dropped here from the sky by some kind of vehicle. Unless we actually contact the race, we may never really know."

"How you expect to communicate with a dead race is beyond me," snipes Elleen.

Serba ignores her.

"You'd think with all the false Telen phenomena put together with the artifacts that we'd generate more interest," sniffs Eckart as he joins us after all.

"Who is going to shell out that much currency to come here?" is Elleen's response.

Eckart puts aside his mask and blows his nose. Serba clears her throat.

I return to examining the objects. Our faces reflect back at me and obscure my view until I readjust my position. Displays always seem to be built for taller people.

Even with the different angle, I discern nothing new. No residual energy or feelings that connect them to Glim's and my experience. I wish the answer were this easy. Glim's shoulders droop a bit. He looks over at me, "Nothing. You ?"

"Nothing," I say, shaking my head. "Sorry, Serba. These aren't responsible. Nor do they suggest any meaning or use."

"I never really expected they would. I only hoped. Perhaps we'll learn more from the experiments next week. You should have started your tests by then as well." And perhaps the disrupters will no longer be necessary, she sends. I shrug. Hope seems far away, given Madrin's position. She is, after all, a telepist; her opinion carries the weight of the Interplanetary Department of Justice behind it.

The sky is flawless again today. We certainly picked the right season to emigrate. The other colonists, though, tell me MON will make up for it later with rain and eventually a vicious wint or. At that point we will move into the colony proper. But today the deep indigo sky seems endless.

The Pool mirrors its surroundings with an almost rippleless skin. After today's break, the Monitor testing will continue tomorrow along with the start of the new series of experiments to contact the Ellysians. Since this will involve, at the very, least, wading in to the Pool, Glim must be introduced m swimming.

I watch Glim make his way slowly through the shallows, with great trepidation. He looks back at me smiling like a child, but his eyes beg me to tell him, "It's okay, you don't have to learn how to swim." I smile back at him like a tolerant mother. Glim would probably capitalize the "m" in that word for doing this to him. A curious invective Glim claims comes from an old Earth colony, but he cannot be sure.

I only wish I could be going in with him, holding him up, rather than Serba with her thick blue neoprene gloves. Serba tells me she's a superb swimmer, but I still wish it was me teaching him. I've given up swimming for so long in deference to his fears. As it is, I can only shout encouragement and

blandishments as the lesson progresses.

A zipper lands nearby. Madrin exits and comes over to me. Why can't she just leave us alone? "Are you feeling any better?" When we left Madrin and the testing yesterday, I was nearly too tired to walk.

"I'm still tired; Glim's stamina is better than mine. He's been after me lately about going to sleep every night instead of spending time with him."

"Interesting," she says with a hint of distaste. "Do you mind if I watch with you?"

I shrug. "You'll have to throw one negative comment for at least every three, otherwise Glim will get too cocky about his progress." As if we would ever have to worry about encouragement from Madrin, interrogator at large.

"I think I will remain silent and stoic on the shore."

I shrug again. How are our tests progressing? I want to ask. I almost do, but I am too angry at her for the silent wedge she's driven between Glim and me. I wonder how much of her distrust of our relationship comes from her telepist training. How much from irrational fear? How much from jealousy at our communion?

A splash calls my attention back to the Pool. Serba takes Glim in over his head.

He seems to be floating pretty well, if cautiously. She keeps moving away from him for longer periods while he gets his balance and breathing regulated. Soon he is actually paddling about. Except for the first public moments after our "mind sex" I have never seen Glim look awkward. I love him all the more for it.

I long to touch him, but I know standing here, especially with Madrin right next to me, that I can't . . .

The Pool stretches out, silver and unruffled, before us. The strange reflective properties of the water do not allow us to see the bottom. Two other zippers are on the other side of the water, and a separate group of people standing by the bank watches Glim's progress.

Some children toss a ball back and forth by the bank. It is one of the dense balls used to play fryondy. They throw it harder and harder at each other, waiting to see who will give up first. The one closer to the Pool finally ducks.

The ball sails out over the edge, clips Glimmer on the forehead and then sinks.

For a brief moment I think he is going to come out of the Pool and chase the boys about, all in good fun. Instead I see his eyes roll and he goes limp, slipping below the surface.

Serba immediately starts to swim to where he went down. My heartbeat races; the boys who were throwing the ball run away.

I start toward the Pool, but Madrin catches my arm. I react without thinking.

Let go, I send at her. The Telen must be especially strong with our physical contact; all of my anger, frustration, and fear pour through it. Her face pales,
and she wrenches her hand from my arm.

"Can you sense him?" she asks, her voice wavering.

Jump, commands the voice.

Serba resurfaces without Glim. I cannot wait any longer. I run for the Pool. I pour all of my Telen into the Pool searching for any wisp that might be Glim. If anyone can find him, it's me. I hear others diving in around me, but they search aimlessly. Blinded by the mirror of the water.

Glim's mind touches me. I can't, he says to no one in particular. I can't.

Something breaks the surface of the Pool, and without thinking I dive into the Pool toward it. When I break the surface, the hair on the back of my neck and on my lower arms is prickling, and the air seems to darken around me. A splash, and Glim surfaces in front of me, his forehead marred by an angry reddening bruise. Energy begins to fill me. The darkness intensifies, tinged with orange and white.

Can you touch the bottom? he asks.

Just barely, I think.

He reaches out to hold onto my arm, and the energy intensifies tenfold, bubbling through my body until I feel like I'll explode in a burst of white, black, and orange light.

The light breaks through the darkness over me, and looking up, I see in the black and brilliant orange two of them floating amid the miasmic colors.

The woman is beautiful, black hair, brown face. The others are here, she says, and I can sense them all; children, adults, the chaperon, all of them who dove into the Pool, the weave of Telen from a world of minds shaping the conduit we are floating in. They are pure spirit. Come, join us, she says. I'm here to greet you. We've been waiting for you.

I can't swim, says Glim, grabbing harder onto my arm, and I realize that white light and black and orange continue to surround me and now ooze out to envelop Glim as well. I can't touch bottom anymore.

I can't swim, Glim repeats. I sweep him up in my arms and hold him, his arms going around my neck; he isn't too heavy for me, which can't be right.

Don't worry, I assure him, I'll teach you how.

The more complete contact brings our minds together, and the meld is dizzying. Glim says, I'm not sure.

Glim, I love you. I promise you, I'll teach you how to swim. We'll always be together. Like this-- not separated by a disrupter or a telepist or anything.

The color and light are all around us, and we begin to float up, into it, our physicality bleeding away. The others around the Pool fade back into the other reality, further away every moment.

I look up at the woman. Her hair is silver now, and her shape wavers as the current moves around her. She is glorious, but the welcome I felt only moments before is now colored with something sour.

Drop him, she says to me.

What? is my response. I cannot have heard her. I can feel the thought of my heart begin to thump in my chest.

I said, drop him. He's weak like the others. Don't tie yourself to such a one, she repeats. There's no reason for you to waste yourself on a lowly warrior. There are many more worthy for your attention.

This is the Telen I have been hearing since our arrival. These are the Ellysians. The consequences rattle through my brain as we float, stunned by the light and beauty.

Jude, Glim's Telen seems to emanate from my own mind, I can't swim, he says. But

what if I can't teach him? The woman keeps beckoning. We float without effort toward her, Glim trailing behind clinging to my arm. Drop him? No. Never.

No.

Resist, I say to Glim/me.

You can't resist, the Ellyisian says. You've already been altered. You can't survive in that dimension any longer. We've been waiting for you. There are so many who want to see you.

Resist, I say. I can feel Glim joining with me to pull away from the Ellyisian. The sinews of our minds weave together as one. Resist, we say. We start to slow.

I look back toward the darkness where our world was only moments ago, the world

where we worked together and sacrificed so much only to make a place for ourselves, a place that is tentative at best, but a place nonetheless.

The Ellyisian speaks again, but I close my eyes to her, feeling Glim against me,

embracing him. This way, she orders me. Come this way, her ordering turning to pleading.

No, we say. We continue to pull away. The darkness becomes our focus. Together we push away from the woman. She starts to fade as the darkness envelops us even

as the conduit attempts to close about us. Weight reasserts itself, and our flesh begins to bubble, searing away from the bone. Hideous pain, but our minds

are still joined.

You will die, she blasts, and I can sense her need, the need of her race, their

need for the strength of my Telen. We feel her pull at me, trying to seduce me into coming to them, the salving effect of the light countering the bum of the

darkness.

We will stay together. Struggling back to the physical world in an explosion of pain, a searing blaze of energy, a joined sharing on into infinity.

You will die, she screams again as we drift farther. Look at what we offer you.

Just look. How can you reject it? Life is better than the fate you are choosing.

Our pain ripples back up through her as our limbs wither, and we now understand

the twisted artifacts in the Justice building.

Not apart. The conduit pulls at us more desperately.

No, she howls, come back.

Together. We resist.