

*The Waters of Zior*

*A Heart Song*

*by*

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# Chapter One

Jorral sat, watching the waves flow in and out of the sea.

*What will be will never come again. The waves crash and fade. This is the beginning of the end.*

“Do you see yourself reflected in the birthing of the waves, Jorral?” asked a slender woman with dazzling green eyes.

“I believe I do, Ninnia. Or at least, some part of myself.”

Jorral mused for a moment on the infinite reflections of his personality streaming out through the world. He thought it virtually impossible to perceive the nature of the self.

*Or perhaps I simply haven't evolved high enough along the spiral of my being.*

Ninnia let out a sigh, propelling her delicate breathe on the wind, out to the ocean that stretched before her. The rolling water stretched out as far as the eye could see. Sunlight sparkled off the tiny wave crests as seagulls called out into the open sky.

Suddenly, Jorral broke the silence with one of his laughs, the kind that Ninnia took to mean that some new and delightful insight had just risen up within him.

“You know, you think you know something, but then it just shifts and spreads into a million different shards of ideas, and suddenly you come to a point where you just have to throw your hands up and delight in the mystery of existence,” he said with a smile.

“You mean like that seagull there?” replied Ninnia.

“In a way, yes,” he said, his brow now furrowing slightly in concern. “I am that bird that takes flight and moves with the wind. That sees the sea stretch before him and gets caught in the current of its life force. I seem to know my place but always there are other doors hidden within me. And behind each lies a waiting Jester, ready to spring forth with laughter and poke holes in my grasp of truth.”

“Mmm. Indeed?” Ninnia replied with a sly smile. She enjoyed teasing Jorral about his search for the profound. Not too much, however. In fact it was one of his endearing traits. She knew he could always be counted on to plunge into the depths of thought and provide an interesting tidbit to chew on.

Jorral's dazzling ebony eyes danced ever so slightly as he took in the visage of his lover. They were around the same age, both in their early adulthood. Both possessing long black hair and the long, lean, and muscular frame most common among their race.

“Well, shall we return home?” Jorral asked as he took Ninnia's hand.

“I almost hate to with this weather, but I suppose we should,” Ninnia replied a bit longingly, “and at least we can check on our idego pods when we get back.”

“That sounds lovely,” he answered lightly.

So they gathered themselves and set off into the crystal city as the long march of waves continued unabated behind them.

## Chapter Two

“The pools grow dark Alex. What would you have us do now?”

The man known as the Changeling Prince sent his hard icy stare out through the glass of the tower and into the world below. He had been expecting this question, but the answer disquieted him.

*Where this road will lead, I can but guess. Still, I suppose in the infinite fragmenting loop of non-time it shall be settled sooner or later.*

“Ready the *Light Bearer*. It is time we set sail,” the prince ordered in almost hushed, yet powerfully commanding tones.

The other man's only indication of concern could be seen in the slight shifting of his eyes and the creasing of his wrinkled leathery hands.

“As you wish, sir.” he spoke in the crackling soft tones of one of the wizened elders of Zior. As such, he was given a special place in the world of the crystal children. But then, weren't they all?

With that, the old man turned and left the room, his long coat brushing softly on the smooth floor.

The man who had commanded him to exit continued to ponder the citizens below him.

*So many lives. Countless generations of souls. Many flown before me, many more to come. I pray I can do what must be done for my people.*

## Chapter Three

Ninnia frowned as she turned a spiky red pod in her hand. She had hoped that the fruit would be ready by this time, but it appeared as though she would have to wait. The idego had long been a traditional food of her people. Known for its somewhat intoxicating properties and potent smell, it was one of her favorite summer delicacies. She loved tearing them open and sharing the sweet meat of the fruit with her companions in the town square as they watched the Inkantu spirit warriors march by on Soulcasting day.

It was a time of joyous celebration, when all the elders came forth from their dwelling places to be acknowledged for their sacred contributions to the communal pool of Zior. They would file proudly before the rest of the city's inhabitants, dressed in finely woven ceremonial gowns. Each outfit was crafted in a swirl of bright colors, chosen to represent the particular aura of each master. Indigos, oranges, violent purples, bursting reds, and neon greens shot forth from each of the passing shamans as they paraded past Ninnia and her companions.

The taste of the fruit reminded her of the sweetness of the elders' dress. The soft psychedelic tint she perceived was being given to her by the ingestion of the idego, a small thread interlinked with the psychospiritual world of the elders of Zior.

It was a time of deep bliss and entrancement.

Today, however, she would have to wait and take in the sights and sounds of the seemingly more mundane, but as she had come to know, infinitely complex and spectacular world of everyday life.

"Seems like you could use something to brighten the day." Jorral's deep voice resonated from behind her in the doorway to their home. He stood smiling at her as if he kept some secret, hidden within his grasp.

"And you're just the person to provide me with that, aren't you?" she said with a loving smile.

"Behold! The flower of Xarnax!" he exclaimed as he produced a star shaped blossom from behind his back.

"Where did you get that?!" Ninnia gasped in soft wonder. The flower Jorral held before her had been extremely scarce as of late. In fact, the last time she had seen one was...

"Our joining day! I had Finx take one of the blooms from our union seal and preserve the seed," he beamed.

"You mean...?" she began, excitement bubbling up within her. "But I thought they had been deemed nearly extinct!"

"Happy day of infinite miracles, my dear," Jorral replied, allowing the full measure of his pride for his act of love to be featured on his face.

"Oh, Jorral!" She ran to embrace him then, kissing him slowly with a mixture of glee and passion.

"Only the best for thee," he whispered into her eyes.

The two lovers then embraced more fully and closed their eyes, letting the soft breeze from the sea wind its way through their long silken hair. They began to synchronize their breathing, slowly deepening their inhalations as they matched each other's heart rates. Soon they began to feel a slight tingling rise from within themselves and move into the other. The feeling of connecting to a sacred companion's heart wheel was unmistakable in its simplicity and depth. The feeling was often described as one of profound love, an infinite pulse of utmost joy and naked compassion.

Tears began to flow quietly from their eyes. The stream of emotion trickled gently down the lovers' faces and was carried off by the breathe of the wind.

Slowly, they felt themselves rise into a higher vibrational state. It felt as if they were gently shaking themselves awake and floating into the heavens.

Colors became softer, yet somehow more pervasive. Light became gradually more encompassing as they rose together.

Soon they were enveloped in a world of gently swirling wind and light.

Jorral looked into his heartmate's eyes and began to speak through his thoughts.

"Here, we are one," he began.

"As we shall ever be," she finished.

"As it ever was."

"Until the infinite dream is returned to the start."

"And we are set once again into the stream of all that is."

The sacred words completed, the two dissolved into each other, their being flung out into the vast reaches of the outer dimensions beyond time and space.

Jorral and Ninnia's eyes snapped back into focus below.

"Mmm. I do like this place," he said as a tiny smile began to form on his lips.

"Of course. It is our home," she replied with a laugh.

As they unfolded themselves from their embrace, Ninnia took stock of the sky. The sun was beginning to fall into the sea, signaling the beginning of nightfall.

"Well, I certainly am less concerned about the idego fruit now," she said with a giggle.

With that, Jorral burst out laughing.

"Ah yes, perspective."

## *Chapter Four*

The Changeling Prince shifted in his sleep. Dreams fled before him as the echoes of time rippled through space.

“Come now, you are the Prince of Light. It is you who must bring them back to see.” The voice came from seemingly nowhere and everywhere.

“What is it you would have me do?” he called into the darkness.

“Be not afraid. Cast your desires out into the reaches of space.”

Alex breathed deeply then, and began to recite the words he had so often told himself in the long stretches of darkness in ages past.

“I will be as I am in truth. I am the light that pervades. I will live in lasting love. There is no darkness to sway my course.”

“Yes, it is you who commands the seas of your fate,” the woman's voice called out once again.

“And what is your part in all this? Who are you?”

“That is not important now,” she replied softly. “All that must be known is already given. Look inside and know that it is true.”

The prince exhaled, then began to move into the darkness.

## Chapter Five

The sea exhales, and my mind is spent.

Jorral awoke the next morning with the sounds of the phee birds in his ears. Their entrancing melody swirled through his consciousness as he slowly opened his eyes. As he gazed around the room at the first signs of dawn, he began to take stock of all that he loved about his dwelling place. The colors of the artwork, the gifts from friends, the light of the burning sun as it poured into his room. He let the feeling of the sheets sink into the marrow of his bones as he relished their soft velvety texture. He took a profoundly deep breathe as he attempted to elevate his energy to the highest level possible.

This was a ritual that Jorral performed almost every morning upon awakening. The idea was to get into an energetic mind-body framework capable of perceiving reality in the most favorable light possible. He had been taught since he was a boy that his life would take shape according to his thoughts, feelings, and desires. He personally found it undesirable, perhaps impossible, to try to control his desires, but guiding his thoughts was another matter.

So, as he proceeded along the path to righteous awakening, he began to awake more fully into the day. He gathered his strength and stood stretching before the bedroom window. He parted the curtains and began to murmur a response to the birds.

Jorral was a singer, which in Zior meant he was one who wove tapestries of creation with words. He had the gift of knowing which sound vibrations, indeed 'words', could produce a given effect in people, machines, stones, and, in this case, birds.

"And what are you telling our dear feathery friends today, dear?" Ninnia wondered through the sheet softly draped over her head.

"I am telling them to spread the seed of Zior, the essence of life, to the vast clouds forming on the horizon of thought in this age," he responded enigmatically.

"You do have a way with words, my dear," Ninnia said proudly.

*All things shall coalesce, and then be reborn.*

"Time for breakfast!" squeaked the little blue creature who had just burst into the bedroom. He was a tiny four-legged thing swathed in blue fur with a bright green beak protruding from his snout. As he bounced crazily and cheerfully around the room, he made little jingling sounds on account of the bell he wore around his neck.

"Indeed. How could I forget with all that jangling you make, Ferro?" Jorral said teasingly.

"I likes my necklace, thank you!" Ferro responded, slightly indignantly. "Now, about that breakfast..."

"Yes, yes, weedle berries and horned oot flank, coming right up!" Jorral said with a grin.

"Gawk! Delicious!" replied the little blue ragamuffin.

Jorral laughed as he wandered into the kitchen to prepare the food for his furry friend.

Soon the pungent aroma of slightly overripe berries and roasted reptile wafted in to the bedroom, causing Ninnia to finally stir and pull herself out of bed.

"So strange that we eat so differently than you, Ferro," she pointed out.

"Mmm, your loss!" Ferro answered through mouthfuls of warm food.

"All part of the mystery of creation," mused Jorral.

"Hmm. And what might we do with more thorough understanding?" Ninnia proposed in question.

"The sounds of the universe come to me in many forms, and I understand but their effect. I play at their meaning, and give them a final form, that I may see a certain penetrating vision enacted on the world I inhabit. Yet, what would I do were I to know their source, the very essence of their existence?"

Jorral asked.

“Well, what would you do, lover?”

“I suppose the answer to that is as mysterious as the origins of which you speak. Do I know my own nature well enough to answer?” Jorral took a deep breathe in an attempt to clear his mind and gain some form of clarity on the subject. He did this often, as he was one to gaze into the pool of consciousness frequently.

“I suppose I should be liberated. Free to pursue whatever I wished at any time. There would be no more fear of misunderstanding, no need to search for knowledge. Everything would be transparent to me. Even the source of my desires, perhaps even the means to control them, should I wish. But then, wouldn't that be somewhat paradoxical? If I had the desire to control other desires, I would still have desires arising from somewhere. This seems to lead to more questions, such as where do desires come from? What is this 'I' that does the choosing. These are murky waters indeed,” Jorral answered in a series of quick remarks.

Ninnia smiled. “Jorral, dearest, sometimes I believe you think too much.”

“But beloved! That's practically my job description! If I didn't try to understand the world, how could I sing to it?” Jorral answered in defense.

“All I know is that I'm perfectly happy to be one who only has to speak to plants,” Ninnia responded with a laugh.

“You may yet find there is much more to you and your work than you believe, dearest,” Jorral replied mysteriously.

Ninnia gazed at her lifemate, somewhat perplexed. She had known him for many years, yet still it seemed there was so much to learn about him.

*Perhaps that comes from the deep waters he sometimes casts his thoughts into.* She thought to herself.

Suddenly, Jorral let the seriousness of his gaze fall. He then took her in his arms in an embrace that was startlingly gentle for one who commanded the words of worlds. She could see herself whiling away the day inside those muscular arms that possessed such fine strength. The thought of curling into an ecstatic ball of joy with Jorral sent a little shiver of pleasure down her spine. She let him take her closer inward. What an excellent way to start the day...

“Time for a walk in the sunshine!” Ferro shouted to the entwined lovers.

“Ferro! Right now?” Ninnia pleaded.

“Lovely day for a walk, sillyhead!” Ferro chirped, as if this should be perfectly obvious to anyone.

“Come on dear. There will be plenty of time for ourselves this evening. I have a....feeling,” Jorral beamed.

“Oh, indeed?” Ninnia smiled knowingly. “Well, in that case, I suppose a little sunshine couldn't hurt.”

And out into the finely crafted streets of Zior they went, little Ferro trotting haughtily out in front of them.



## Chapter Six

“What is the nature of my existence?” the Changeling Prince asked himself as he exhaled slowly.

He wasn't sure he expected an answer to that, but he was always curious enough to try.

A spirit in motion. On a journey of expansion and exploration. Perhaps I am the essence of all that is.

He mused on this for a while.

On to more immediate concerns then. What shall be done with this vessel at this time? What feels right?

The people of Zior had been practicing the art of inner inquiry for a very, very long time. Long ago, their ancestors had been fragmented in their thoughts, and many were unable to see themselves for who they truly were. Even their very desires at times alluded them.

Over time they realized that by consulting their feelings, and expressing themselves as fully as possible through what felt right, they could come to realize their true selves.

They had learned to see themselves as more than their actions, more than perceived notions of what could or should be. They now tried to allow themselves to become beings of constant light expression.

Still, from time to time it was useful to ask one's inner being what was wanted.

“Gather your crew,” a tiny voice whispered.

The prince inhaled deeply and allowed himself to relax further. Soon images of other beings began to enter his mind. A young girl with quick darting eyes and the frame of a wily creature. A man nearing middle age. Piercing black eyes and a gentle smile.

The image of a laughing youth floated into his mind's eye. Suddenly, the image split into a three-headed hydra, writhing about.

Soon the image faded into many clouds of what appeared to be smoke.

Through these clouds came two enormous purple gleaming eyes. Knowing eyes that seemed to laugh at the prince. Eyes that hypnotized as they gazed into one's soul.

Suddenly, lightning burst through the clouds in fantastic sparks of purple light. Thunder boomed as the eyes began to draw nearer. Then came a whisper...

*“Come to me, Jorral.”*

The prince opened his eyes with a start. He picked himself up off the floor, and burst out of the room.

He knew what he had to do.

## Chapter Seven

Ninnia and Jorral were walking hand in hand when news of Jorral's departure came. They had been through Naftel park, a relatively small place for nature to grow and for the inhabitants of the city to relax and enjoy themselves.

A young crystal weaver had happened to catch Ferro's eye. This particular performer was a young female, probably 20 years of age or so. She held a bright blue flames of a crystal in between her hands. As she began to sway from side to side the crystal would change the way it emitted light. A breeze here, or a twitch of the arm there, would send some form of undetected signal to the crystal, causing its light patterns to change. This in turn led to various light displays being projected onto the crystal weaver herself.

Jorral chuckled to himself as he watched the light change patterns.

"What do you see, love?" Ninnia asked him.

"You see that triangular pattern with the three dots that keeps reappearing in the center of her forehead?" he inquired.

"Yes, the symbol for our star, Kaless," she said, brightening.

"Good! Now, watch the outside of her hands."

Even as he spoke, Ninnia saw a pattern of circles dance around the crystal weaver's hands.

"The lights form circles...it reminds me of the orbits of heavenly bodies," Ninnia conceded.

"Yes! I had the same thought. Now, what about the dancer herself?"

"Why, she is dancing in a relatively circular motion, holding an extremely brightly shining crystal."

"As above, so below," Jorral laughed.

"And what's more, the crystal is the source of the light displays on her body," Ninnia added.

"Just as we are sustained by our sun, Kaless." Jorral smiled warmly at his life partner.

"Yes, I see now."

Jorral greatly enjoyed sharing these multi-faceted labyrinthian insights with Ninnia. He likened it to a river's need to pour itself into the sea. He had a need to nourish others with insights that travelled through him from heavens knew where.

Ferro sat and stared happily at the crystal weaver. His bright green eyes danced as the young girl began to move her hands outward and up towards the sky. Some unseen force kept the crystal suspended in air as the dancer moved her hands skyward.

"Ah, now see the symbol that appears on her palms," Jorral pointed out.

"The many stars within a perfect circle, linked around the perimeter," Ninnia said happily.

"Which represents?"

"The eternal life within us all. Yes, I see it. It's again a metaphor echoed by the crystal suspended in midair, as here the crystal represents the heart center inside each of us," Ninnia said with excitement in her eyes.

"It is good to have reminders of these sorts of things," Jorral said softly.

Suddenly, the soft buzzing of lorrans could be heard approaching.

"Ah, nature's messengers are arriving," Jorral commented.

One of the fat little insectoid creatures began to hover more slowly around Jorral's ear. Soon it came to rest directly on his right earlobe. There it buzzed for a short time. As it did so, Ninnia could see Jorral's eyes first grow wide in surprise, then narrow in concentration. By the time the bee buzzed away, Jorral's head was lowered slightly in thought, and what appeared to Ninnia as a mild showing of muted sadness.

“Beloved, what is it?” she asked gently, placing her hand atop his arm.  
Jorral let out a deep sigh.  
“It seems as though I am to be traveling away for a time.”

## Chapter Eight

*"I have scattered my ashes into infinite fragments of other beings, other times."*

### ▼ The Changeling Prince

Excitement ran throughout the compound. It had been millenia since the *Light Bearer* had been used in any capacity other than what could best be called a parade.

Hundreds of men and women in bright blue uniforms scurried about the hangar, each focused intently on their given task. On the shoulder of each worker's uniform was sewn the insignia of Zior's star crew – a double helix woven of stars.

Jorral felt, and looked, fairly bewildered amidst all the hubbub.

"Not used to all the activity, eh?" an older woman asked as she sidled up next to him. She wore a uniform much like the others, only hers was replete with a few more elaborate insignias. This signified to Jorral that she had been working with star voyages for some time. One of the insignias in particular interested him, that of a quasar in the shape of a purple rose, unfolding in space. Very few people had been known to wear such a symbol. To Jorral, the insignia, coupled with the singularly unique visage of the elderly woman, could mean only one thing.

"No, Madame Xing. In fact, I never thought I would be anywhere near an active starship, if you want the truth."

"Is that so?" Madame Xing asked as a pert smile appeared through the creases of her face.

"Well, you picked a fine ship to have your initial voyage on, that's for sure." As she spoke, her eyes began to sparkle ever so slightly.

"So it would seem. Still, I'm not entirely sure why I've been chosen for this particular voyage," Jorral said in a somewhat baffled tone of voice.

"I'm sure our dear Prince has his reasons," Xing noted.

"Of course," Jorral conceded.

The hurried movements of the star crew reminded Jorral of bees, one of his favorite creatures. Laser wrenches and crystal gauges were put to work as the *Light Bearer* was made ready for its voyage into the cosmos.

The ship itself was a massive, yet sleekly designed leviathan of a craft. It was almost a floating city unto itself, so great was its size. Innumerable circular windows peered out on either side, giving one an impression of the multitudes who would be living onboard during flight.

The hull itself was painted jet black to match the emptiness of space. Which would be somewhat ironic given the name of the ship, were it not for some of its other features, namely its purpose.

Despite the fact that it had not set out on a journey of any kind beyond the planet in the last few thousand years, the tales of the *Light Bearer* were extremely well known amongst the populace of Zior. Legend had it that the ship had brought the planet's first inhabitants here from far away. Tales of interstellar travels, distant galaxies, and bizarre but wondrous alien civilizations were known by every youngster in every home. It was even said that the ship still carried the tales of its voyages deep within itself, and if one were gifted enough and listened very closely, all the secrets of the *Light Bearer* would be revealed.

Jorral could recall his own father telling him tales of the great *Light Bearer* crossing through the Nebula of Hope on a quest to find a planet containing Xylenex, the infinitesimally rare mineral from which all the heart crystals of Zior were formed. Thinking about the massive energy that went into creating the simple tools that he used to brew Ja'reef tea, or open his third eye, sent Jorral's mind on a

spiraling trip of wonder.

“Well, I had best leave you to it then. I'm sure they'll be needing you soon,” Madame Xing said with a slight inclination of the head.

Jorral shook himself as if coming out of a daze.

“Yes, I suppose you're right,” he said with a chuckle. “It was nice meeting you.”

“And you as well, Jorral.”

With that, she turned and left.

Then it struck Jorral.

*How did she know my name?* He wondered.

It was too late to ask, however, as Madame Xing had already vanished, leaving only empty space beside him.

Soon that space was occupied by someone with whom he was very well acquainted.

“Dearest Ninnia, how are you?” Jorral said, his face a mixture of happiness and concern.

“Oh Jorral,” she exclaimed, wrapping her arms around him. She clung tightly to him, savoring the feeling she feared she would miss when he went away to visit the stars.

“There, there. All shall be well.” Jorral caressed her soft raven hair with his hands, drawing out the fine strands through his fingers.

Both of them knew it could be a long time before they saw each other again. They knew they would likely be able to stay in touch for quite a while by using the communications on board the ship and their own conscious powers, but somehow everything seemed so uncertain.

“It's just that I've never been apart from you since our purposes became linked those many years ago.”

“It will be quite a change, to say the least,” Jorral agreed. “But know that I love you no matter what occurs or how far into the depths of space we travel.”

“I know, love, and you know I feel the same.”

“And we can always meet on the astral plane, can't we?”

“Yes, I suppose you're right,” Ninnia said, brightening a little. “Thank heavens for that. I couldn't imagine having nothing but memories and future dreams of our love to subside on.”

“After so many turns of the passing sun spent together in bliss? Unthinkable!” he said with a smile.

“Oh, Jorral, I do love your way,” she said as she pressed herself into his chest.

Jorral made a small appreciative moan as she squeezed him tighter.

“Of course, I shall miss you too!” squeaked a small blue creature that peered out from behind Ninnia's legs.

“Ferro! How nice to see you.” With that, Jorral bent down to pet his furry friend.

“Don't get too cold out there in ol' space, J!” Ferro chimed funnily.

“Of course not! Me?” Jorral laughed

Suddenly the party's attention was won by a man clearing his throat in an effort to command their focus.

“May I help you?” Jorral asked the man. He was dressed in one of the bright blue uniforms of the star crew. On his head he wore a squat, cylindrical black hat, the same color as the mustache which sat upon his lip.

“Your presence is requested onboard, sir.”

“Very well, I shall be right there,” Jorral answered.

The man gave a small perfunctory bow, turned on his heels, and left.

Jorral gazed into his lover's eyes. He held her shoulders so he could maintain his focus upon the windows to her soul. Then he drew her in for one last embrace before he departed.

“I love you, Ninnia.”

“I love you too, Jorral.”

Then he left, to board the immense ship that had captivated the minds of so many of the dreamers and wanderers of Zior. He left behind the greatest companion of his life to begin a voyage into the unknown.

## Chapter Nine

“Look into the water, and tell me what you see.”

The young man with azure eyes like jewels gazed into the reflective, glass-like surface and pondered.

“I see a world in constant change. Laughing faces. Souls running through the air. Countless flames alight and singing in joy.”

“And do you see no shadows then?” the old man with the pointed goatee asked.

The young man concentrated for a moment and considered this.

“As I imagine it, it does come into being. A world rent asunder. Souls in torment. But why am I looking for this?”

“Merely a question,” the old man replied cryptically.

“Of what value is this exercise?” the youth repeated.

“Of what value is this extreme contrast, you might ask,” the old man said pointedly. “Does it enhance the value of the earlier, more pleasant images? Does the destruction excite? Why does it exist at all?”

“These are difficult questions you ask, Darael...,” the young man responded with a sigh.

“Oh, indeed?” The old man let out a long laugh. “Still, it may be of some use to ask them. For then one may best use their own mind. Furthermore...”

“It may be of value to see if the teachings by which my mind has been inevitably shaped hold true in practice. Yes, so you have taught me,” the young man finished.

Darael smiled serenely. He enjoyed playing these games of the mind quite a lot. He began to move around to the opposite side of the pool. As he did so, his long purple robe swished gently upon the smooth marble floor.

Small gemstones placed along the edges of his costume glittered while soft piezoelectric light bounced off of his figure.

“And so, what conclusions have you drawn Lexi?”

“I believe it depends upon the emotional responses I have to these images,” the young man began. “Having grown up in a world largely ruled by peace and prosperity, I suppose I don't really understand the images of war. The ideas behind abject depression, strife, longing, and lack. They seem strange and alien to me. And yet...”

“Yes?” Darael asked, eyebrows raised.

“And yet, something in me feels the pain of those in the images. It is a somewhat distant sensation in some cases, but I am aware of it all the same.”

“Ah. So then would you likely choose such things were you able to choose whatever you wished?”

“Of course not!” Lexi replied quickly.

“What then *would* you choose?” Darael continued.

“I suppose I would choose something more like the other images. A world of beauty and love. A world of gleaming ideals, shining perfection. A world similar to my own. I'd choose nature in harmony with our species, continued learning and sharing. Enough for all.”

“Marvelous. Let us remember that then as we continue through our day. Let us uphold that vision of lighted purity and go forth into Zior to spread that beauty like wildfire. Our lesson for today is complete.”

## Chapter 10

When the *Light Bearer* was ready to leave Zior, it seemed as though virtually all of the city's inhabitants had gathered to watch.

This came as a surprise to no one, as who would want to miss an event so nearly singular that it hadn't taken place in millennia?

The massive ship sat square in the center of an enormous clearing. From below, the various workers onboard looked like little blue ants scurrying about. There was an unmistakable buzz of excitement in the air, as if everyone was holding their breathe and dancing in place simultaneously.

Everyone was waiting for the floating city to take flight to the stars.

As if in answer to their silent prayers, all the workers either climbed onboard or lowered themselves to the ground and moved a safe distance away from the ship.

This brought the crowd's energy up from a slow percolation to a near fever pitch. One thought was on everyone's minds.

The *Light Bearer* was about to take off.

Suddenly, a low thrumming sound began to move through the shouts of the onlookers. Lights flicked on all over the massive black hull of the ship. The *Light Bearer* hung low over the ground, and in a flash it was gone. It had zipped into space in the blink of an eye, to return who knew when.



## Chapter 11

The day after Jorral set sail for the stars, Ninnia had been working with the plants in the garden of The Beltex Center for the Spiritual Development of Youth, or 'The Bell Center' for short.

She had gone into a trance state in order to converse with a species of orchidix named flame star for its swirling bright red and yellow patterns. She wanted to know what it needed for its well being, and she also wanted to communicate to it that it was loved.

Her beloved may have been far away on a mission of great importance, but that did not lessen the amount of concentration or energy she put into her work. Opening a continuum of loving communication between herself and a plant was always a joyous and sacred occasion no matter how many times she undertook the task. Each instance of linking with the spirit of the flame star produced a unique and vibrant feeling within her. It was almost like riding the subtle waves of the sea.

Today the plant wanted a bit of water and to continue absorbing the wonderfully delicious light of the sun.

Ninnia granted this simple gift to the flower. Then she blessed it with an encompassing energy grid of healing.

The plant speakers of Zior had all been well trained in meditation, energy healing, and botany. All of Zior's inhabitants were taught from an early age to respect nature and to try and live in harmony with the plant and animal kingdoms. It was perceived that this was in the best interest of all of Zior, as the plants fostered their development, and each animal lent their own inherent beauty and purpose to the world.

Ninnia felt proud to be a plant speaker. It suited her desire to sit and be still, to cultivate the finer, more elegantly gentle side of life. She loved to think of herself as a shaman feeding future generations with the life force of the planet. It was perceived by many to be a very important role.

Looking around the garden, she could see an array of colorful flora. A riot of colors burst forth from the native flowers: pinks, purples, and reds mingling together like a melting sunset, blues like the deep of the sea or the electric cut of lightning, even flowers as black as the void of space.

*Jorral might see this and wonder where they all came from.* She thought to herself with a small sigh.

*I'm more interested now in where he's going. What reason could the prince have for selecting him? His ability to sing stories?*

There would be no answering that question just now. Better to focus on her duties at hand.

Just then, a group of young boys ran past, having recently been released from studies. Or perhaps it would be better to say, class had simply ended. The students of Zior were never held against their will. After all, better to let the spirit fly free and provide classes that provoked natural impulses such as delight, wonder, and excitement. Thus, the students interest was insured. You may cage a bird, but you cannot cage one's mind.

"Come on, Lexi, let's go play down by the sea!" one of the youths pleaded.

"Just a minute, Talek," said the other with a gentle wave of the hand.

The young man who was the intended playmate of the first turned his head in the direction of Ninnia and her plants. Their eyes met for a moment, and Ninnia could see that the young man's eyes were like deep blue azure pools.

Ninnia thought she could almost feel herself getting lost in those eyes, pulled deeper and deeper into the strange young man's soul.

Suddenly an image flashed through Ninnia's mind of herself standing by a pool of water. The sun was out and the air smelled of citrus and sweat.

“Hello.”

Ninnia gasped. The young man with the sapphire eyes was standing next to her.

“Who are you?” she asked the stranger.

“My name is Lexi,” he answered quietly in a mixture of serenity and severity. He seemed to carry the weight of a thousand ages with him. There was definitely some sort of magnetic pull to this young man.

“Pleased to meet you, Lexi,” Ninnia replied somewhat skeptically. “But what are you doing here?”

Suddenly the image snapped to that of Jorral, hands raised in the air, flashes of purple light stretching across his face.

He was deep in concentration, sweat beading down from his face.

“Jorral!” Ninnia called, reaching out her hand.

Jorral's eyes flashed open.

“Ninnia,” he said with a start.

Without warning, the image was gone, replaced with the relative stillness of the flower garden and the young man, his piercing eyes cutting across the courtyard.

“Come on, Lexi, let's go,” Talek pleaded once more.

Lexi nodded once towards Ninnia. Then the two students turned and left.

Ninnia tried to wipe away the strange feelings of the encounter by shaking herself awake. It was as if she had just awoken from a dream.

*Oh Jorral...*

## Chapter 12

The Changeling Prince sat in a black chair on the bridge of the ship. His eyes were two deep pools of black to match his long, flowing, ebony hair. His thin face was the color of the sky on a grey morning.

Lights ran up and down the chair upon which he sat. His slender frame fit perfectly in the finely crafted plasticine chair. His arms filled out the sleeves of a dark jacket with blue lines etched around the fabric in swirl patterns. He softly touched his fingertips together as he gazed out across the room.

“How do you feel then?” he asked the man across the room.

“Fine, sir. Though still a bit, shall we say, confused.”

Jorral's gentle gaze met with that of the prince. Jorral's eyes danced as they always did when his mind was racing.

“Yes...” the prince began, steepling his fingertips together, “you're wondering what you're doing on a starship traveling away from everything we hold dear. Why have I asked you to accompany us on this mission.” He spoke with little trace of emotion. The words were somewhat cold, yet they belied a wealth of feeling hidden just below the surface.

“The thought had crossed my mind,” Jorral replied.

The Changeling Prince swiveled around in his chair to face an image of what lay just beyond the hull of the ship. Innumerable stars hung in the blackness of space. Fiery plumes formed from the vapors of quasars slowly danced in the void.

“Tell me, what do you see out there, Jorral?”

Jorral pondered the majestic beauty of the constellations for a moment.

“I see a great many things. The mystery of untold worlds. I see perceived emptiness of vacuum. Also, I see limitless potential made manifest.”

“Indeed? Explain,” the prince commanded.

“Mystery, because we know not exactly what lies beyond that with which we are familiar. Emptiness, as it can be perceived at times. Limitless potential, for much the same reason as the first, but also because it seems as though the universe is infinitely vast. How can we hope to exhaust its potential?”

“And there you have part of the answer to your question. I chose you in part for your ability to see many things at once.”

“Is that a skill we shall have need of then?”

“I believe so.” The Changeling Prince let out a long sigh. His skin began to take on a light blue tint as waves of color ran through his face. The colors ran like the currents of emotion within him. This was partly why he had become known as a changeling. The other compelling reason why he was so called had a more metaphysical aspect to it.

Ever since he was a boy, the prince had been known to mysteriously vanish. One moment he would be there, and then – poof! - gone. He would always reappear, not physically, but rather inside one's mental vision.

You would suddenly find yourself taken far away, as if in a dream, to some world where magnificent castles hung in blue vapor, while the prince would bounce giggling through the sky. He would ask you to play, taking you through the clouds by the hand and frolicking with fantastic one-horned creatures with many green eyes, or fish-like beings with mouths made of diamonds.

If you held back, insisting you did not wish to play, he would usually return to his physical body with a mischievous smile on his lips and longing in his eyes.

Throughout his life, he had been known to produce all sorts of potent visions within those

around him. He didn't always ask others to play as he grew and developed a greater sense of responsibility. Yet his games were always lighthearted, and even his stately communications had an air of irreverence and expansive wonder. He prided himself on being able to maintain a view of life that was generously gleeful and optimistic well into adulthood. As such, he was certainly a reflection of some of the best qualities of Zior.

He had been named Prince more as an honorific than any sort of sense of real entitlement. He had been so named near the time of the Great Crossing, the time when the elders of Zior had first broken through the cloud barriers of shattered consciousness and began to realize their true potential as enlightened Godhead personified. One race moving as one, each functioning as they felt right within their own heart center. Working together in an ever spiraling dance of infinite love creation.

The prince had been very busy during this time, popping in and out of the minds of the populace, inviting the citizens of Zior into an ever deepening ocean of blissful play. Tales of his games spread like wildfire. As did his youthful and invigorating energy. It was as if a billion sparks of light had caught fire in the blink of an eye. Each magnificently bright and powered by an infinite energy source.

Soon, those of Zior had gathered together under the knowledge of their own immortality. They believed in the beauty of life and romantic flourishes whether looked for or no. Thus they dubbed him the Changeling Prince in humble acknowledgement of his service.

The prince had returned the favor by acting as a symbol for all that Zior stood for. He was the dance of ego and the limitless bounds of consciousness personified. He would act on behalf of the populace if need be, and, along with the elders of Zior, organize the masses as the call of spirit deemed was necessary.

The prince turned back to face the singer. Jorral looked into his eyes and saw the stardust of space reflected. He saw a soul deep enough to match his own, if not surpass it.

“Why are we out here, Alex?”

“To search for our dreams. The pools of Zior have grown dark as of late, I am afraid.”

That gave Jorral pause. The pools of which he spoke were seen as the physical manifestation of the dreams of Zior. Their shimmering blue water gave rise to visions during slumber, and visions during waking life as well. Visions Jorral had grown to cherish.

“How can this be?” Jorral asked, concerned.

“That is what we are to discover.”

“So out there, somewhere amidst those glowing orbs and flowing gases, lies the salvation of our dreams?”

“It would seem so. My meditations are leading me into the depths of space. I can see the outline of the map, Jorral. I need you to re-write our destiny. To sing the song of our being. There are limitless worlds out there beyond this ship, as you have pointed out. You are to help give them shape, to help our eyes to see, our minds to listen, and our hearts to feel.”

“I shall do my best,” Jorral replied as they drifted through a spiral galaxy of awe-inspiring beauty.

He still wasn't exactly sure what he would be doing, or if he would really be of use. Still, something within him knew that the prince had the right of it. There was life enough out there for all of Zior and beyond, and if anyone could sing the dreams back into the flowing waters of his home that he knew so well, it was he.

## Chapter 13

Ninnia sat with her hands folded in her lap, her dark brown eyes sealed in darkness behind her eyelids. Her breathe flowed in and out in steady drafts of wind.

Inside her mind's eye, she focused on white light – brilliant white light – expanding in all directions. The feeling she sought was one of unconditional love.

*There is always a reason to love, and never a reason not to,* she thought.

She called upon Sek, an enlightened being she enjoyed working with on the astral plane. His appearance was that of a blue skinned man with an easy smile. Beautifully shaped translucent azure wings folded outward to his sides gracefully. He hovered in a sitting position much like Ninnia's. She could feel the wisdom and love flowing between them. It seemed as though this love knew no limits. It was constant and comforting in the extreme.

“Sek, please help me with my feelings regarding Jorral and his voyage.”

“All will be well child. Fear not,” Sek replied in a soothing tone of voice.

“I understand. I simply wish to bolster my faith and feel connected to him while he is away. I feel confused.”

“So you wish to be clear, yes?” Sek asked with a smile.

“Yes. I wish to focus upon our love and commitment and the knowledge that his spirit is safe, and that all will be well.”

“Then take comfort in knowing it is so. Also, you will have many ways to connect with him as he travels. There is the communication relay, shared astral meetings, envisioning each other in a loving embrace, and all the places and things you have shared.”

“Yes. You are right. I must focus on this truth. There is no reason to feel lonely unless I choose it. Still, I wish he were here with me now.”

“That is understandable. You share a bond of deep love, and in the physical form it is only natural that you wish for your companion.”

Ninnia sighed. Her finely crafted features took on a slightly melancholy tinge, but they lost none of their beauty.

“Fear not, dear one. Remember, you can always feel the love you wish to feel if you focus upon it. Simply turn your gaze to the very real and eternal love you have within yourself. Know too that I love you, as does Jorral, no matter what may transpire on his voyage.”

“Thank you, Sek. I am truly grateful. Speaking of Jorral's journey, can you reveal anything about what may transpire?”

“The ultimate outcome is uncertain, as many of the details have not yet taken form, given that there are many decisions yet to be made. Still, there are sure to be many new sights, meetings, and challenges along the way. Jorral is equal to the task, but the best thing you can do is focus upon your life here on Zior. There is much work for you to do in your community, much greater than you realize.”

“What do you mean, Sek?” Ninnia asked with a hint of excitement and trepidation.

“All in time child. For now, simply know that it is enough for you to act with love, courage, and compassion. The rest will follow.”

“Thank you, Sek.”

With that, Ninnia bowed her head slightly and opened her eyes. It was very late, and she felt weary from all the events of the day.

She fell asleep that night to visions of floating angelic beings, her strong and charismatic lover, and a strange and shifting youth in her mind's eye.

## Chapter 14

Jorral sat holding a small, light violet, translucent cube. Depicted on its sides were a number of glyphs and very small characters.

“Morak,” Jorral spoke at the cube.

An image of a small green world presented itself before Jorral. Stretches of what appeared to be white cloud formations moved across the planet's mostly watery surface.

“Morak is a sparsely inhabited planet on the edge of the Dioran galaxy. They possess limited technology and are bound to their planet at this time. The planet itself is teeming with a variety of plant and animal species. Bodies of water are numerous,” a mechanical voice informed Jorral.

*Is it worth a visit? I'm not entirely sure. What to look for...*

He hoped that someone else onboard the *Light Bearer* had more clarity on that particular subject.

“Jon'Blor.”

“Jon'Blor – the home world of the Lazaranthi. It is home to over 13 billion beings from various planets scattered across several galaxies.”

*Quite a contrast to Marok.*

“An evolved civilization both technologically and spiritually. Capable of interstellar travel. Many masters of manifestation and spiritual alchemy reside on this planet. It is a sort of intergalactic hub. Also home to a great number of plant and animal species.”

*Seems worth investigating.*

Jorral had heard of Jon'Blor via the tales of travelers who had paid a visit to Zior. He'd even imagined he might make the trip himself someday, if only to glean from the pooled consciousness of so many learned ones. Yet he hadn't imagined this might be the means by which he made his initial contact with such a revered spiritual world.

Just then a chime sounded at his door.

“Come in,” he called.

The doors slid open to reveal a slender woman with dark curly hair. She wore a uniform of black and grey formed of two pieces of rubbery material that criss-crossed across her body. She had a somewhat reserved but pleasant air about her.

“Greetings, I am Malel.”

“Jorral,” he replied as he stood to embrace her, as was customary amongst many Ziorians.

“Your presence is wanted on the bridge,” she said.

“Very well, let's go.”

She led him down several corridors lit by tiny lights embedded in the walls. Other people were moving in and out of doorways that lined the corridors. Engineers, botanists, crystal smiths, and various workers of all conceivable kinds hurried about the ship. Jorral almost felt like a bit of a stranger amongst so many unknown people.

*I should get to know some of the others.*

So, on Malel led him through a pair of sliding glass doors and onto the bridge.

There were several people sitting in chairs facing towards the ship's front view screen. Before them hung the many glowing orbs of space.

Jorral recognized the Changeling Prince, but no others. Seated to the prince's left was an older bald man with slim grey whiskers hanging down from his upper lip. He wore a purple and blue robe that almost shimmered in the artificial light of the room.

To the right of the prince sat a fairly short girl of perhaps twenty. Her hands were busy working

the controls on the screen in front of her. Her face was pretty but possessed by seriousness at the moment. Her fingers seemed to know exactly where to go on the screen.

“Greetings, Jorral,” another woman to his right said amicably. She was perhaps thirty and wore her hair short and green. Her right ear was pierced in the style of the Bendrosi mages from the eastern lands of Shalale in Zior. She smiled warmly and Jorral returned the gesture.

“Ah, Jorral, welcome!” the prince exclaimed, spinning in his chair. “This is Xandra, one of our star seers.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Jorral said to the green haired woman.

Xandra gave a little bow and embraced Jorral.

“This on my right is Manrel, our resident expert in alien languages.”

The elder man gave a tiny bow to Jorral and a small smile.

“And this is Tysha, our navigator.”

“How's it goin' friend?” Tysha said with a sly smile and a twinkle in her eye.

“She's the best there is, despite her age,” the prince proclaimed.

“I'll get ya where you need to go even if I am a pretty little young thing, if that's what you mean,” Tysha replied with a bit of a laugh.

“Indeed,” the prince returned with a chuckle. “Please, sit.”

Jorral did as he was bid and sat in one of the chairs. Upon sitting, the chair reformed itself to his body. The feeling was snug but not uncomfortable.

“We're heading to the Nexros system of planets,” Xandra said helpfully.

“Any planet in particular?” Jorral asked, the curiosity showing in his voice.

“Ah yes, that one there,” Manrel pointed to a small flashing ball of light to the edge of the screen.

“You may have heard of this one, Jorral. The natives call it Cykleviti, but to us on Zior it is more commonly known as Jon'Blor. It is there that we are making our way.”

## Chapter 15

"If I take no chances, I may be landlocked within myself," Jorral murmured to himself.

Before him lay a land teeming with life. Lush greenery stretched in all directions. Fruit trees grew everywhere. Citadels raised to spiritual congregation and high attunement dotted the land.

*Where are the shifting stones? The fields of discoloration and quiet unrest? The whirling blades of the machine and the laughing voice of the child? Did those ideas, with their quick and easy guile and mirth somehow lose their luster in my quest for purity and perfection?"*

*Am I a ray of light or a spinning disk of many faces? Perhaps I am both?*

The city shattered, and Jorral fell into a swirling vortex of color and sound. He breathed deeply to calm his body's reactions to the raging inferno of stimuli around him.

*So many swirling emotions. Inside myself. Almost like gasping for air.*

Jorral focused on becoming a gently flowing river.

He plunged his being through cool waters and came through the other side of the mirror-like surface. He broke through the water's edge and found himself swimming in the waters of Zior, off the coast from his home. The sun was shining so brightly in the sky, as it often did.

Suddenly, something breached the water's surface nearby. A gentle spray of water washed over his face. Turning his head towards the sound, he saw a sleek, grey form of a dolphin swimming next to him.

A broad smile produced itself across Jorral's face. Dolphins were one of his favorite creatures.

"You can practically see the rainbow energy coming off of these creatures," Ninnia had told him once.

Then suddenly there she was, swimming towards him. Her slender arms gracefully threaded the water as she came towards Jorral and the dolphin.

"What a beautiful friend you have here," she said as her beautiful chocolate colored eyes glittered in the sunlight.

The dolphin made some pleasing clicking sounds and thrashed happily about between the two lovers.

Ninnia and Jorral interlinked their hands around the dolphin and closed their eyes. They began to inhale slowly as the beautiful, perfect energy of the dolphin streamed through them in rainbow colored waves. The feeling within that circle was of total love and contentment.

There was nowhere to go, nothing to become. Nothing was needed. It was bliss in its essence.

Jorral's breathe came out in slow sheets of air, mingling with the gentle sloshing of the ocean waves. Time seemed to slow down then. Beads of water fell like the caress of life from their brows.

Their shining bodies floated gently in the water, and their souls filled their beings like wind fills a sail. They were alive in the true sense of the word. Floating and free, without any need for a tether.

When the meditation ended, and Jorral awoke to the physical space of his room, he felt deeply at peace. Whatever would happen on this journey, he knew that the love and contentment contained within him was untouchable.

Ninnia awoke with a feeling much like that of Jorral's, though she was back on Zior. She was seated in her garden, where the lorrans were busy propagating nature's beauty. The sun hung overhead like some omnipotent fiery god, bestowing life and myth upon the planet.

"I wonder where you came from sun?" She wondered with a smile.

*What a wonderful day to be alive,* she thought blissfully. Not for the first time she marveled at how a simple change of perspective could greatly increase one's enjoyment of life.

*Is it folly to try and change the outside world without first changing the self inside?*



With that thought she gently slapped the tops of her legs and stood to embrace the day.

## Chapter 16

Jorral's laughter echoed off the glass ceiling of the chapel. He was filled with the notion of an epiphany. The joy of being alone and shedding one more folly filled his being.

Overhead, birds flapped their wings, adding the echoes of their flight to the sound of Jorral's laughter.

“Here I am, thinking I am one thing, stuck in time, lost, unsure of what I am doing,” he said to himself with a shake of the head. “When really that is simply one thought I choose to have and entertain for a while. The thoughts themselves are not the fabric of my being. Nor is this flesh. No, I am made of something far more pervasive.”

It was said that when the world awoke, and all knew their purpose and essence, that a thousand such revelations took place every moment.

Jorral remembered being entwined in Ninnia's arms and whispering in her ear.

“Everyday, a million souls are forming new pathways with their minds. Shedding old patterns and never looking back, stretching out to the infinite horizon.”

He was having such a breakthrough now, he realized. Things wouldn't – couldn't – be the same. *Ah, to grow and live through the shifting currents of being.*

A young girl entered the chapel through the large glass doors at the back of the room. She carried herself in such a way that it seemed she was full of wonder and joy. Somehow this made her seem confident despite her youth.

*Confidence comes perhaps not from knowing what to do, but rather from trusting everything will be alright.*

Jorral currently had no children of his own, though he and Ninnia planned on changing that soon. The idea of creating another life took his breathe away. Such a precious gift to the world. A being with their own ideas, personality, gifts, and spirit. An integral piece in the jigsaw puzzle framework of the universe. Someone to teach and guide, and eventually let fly on their own.

To think, he would help create this life with someone so beautiful and caring as Ninnia. Two souls meeting in perfect union to shape another perfect being. The cosmic perfection of the infinite instilled in a living vessel through the union of duality.

*Does my laughter carry such thoughts to the heavens?*

The girl was now meditating nearby.

*Someday, my child too may ponder the inner mysteries of the soul.* He thought with a mixture of profundity and mirth.

*Ah, but I am going off on a tangent. I came to see what I could here about our mission. Still, perhaps it is all connected somehow...*

*Let's try again. Dear universe, how may I best serve our mission on this planet?*

Jorral closed his eyes and took several deep breathes.

Soon the nothingness behind his eyes gave way to reveal a hazy vision of a hammer and an anvil. Then, a magnificently formed crystal held in a woman's hand.

Then came a small voice in the stillness of his mind.

“Seek the artificer.”

Jorral nodded his head in appreciation and made his way towards the exit. As he left, he took one last look at the young girl. She was still seated in a meditative posture, but around her were many white flower petals, floating in midair.

Jorral took a moment to marvel at this display of creativity before making his exit.

*I wonder what other miracles are in store for me on Jon'Blor.*

## Chapter 17

*Thank God for the truth.*

Lexi had been feeling slightly perplexed as to what path to take next. He was so very young in the grand scheme of things, but part of him wanted so badly to move fully into adulthood. To feel the security and seeming finality of partnering with a lifemate and pursuing his life's work.

“Patience, young friend,” his master teacher had counseled him. “There's no need to rush into anything. Trust that your feelings will guide you on. Just focus on love, surrender, and service, and you cannot fail.”

Lexi wanted so badly to believe in Drael's words. Deep down he knew they were true.

Not for the first time, he gave thanks to having been raised with such a perspective. It made many things in life easier.

Jaleesh was a great companion – fun, and interested in many things that Lexi was. They were able to share quality time and learn from one another. However, from the start Lexi knew he did not want to spend his days with her. She simply didn't have that appeal for him. The picture was not quite complete with her in it.

Yet his feelings constantly led him to a place where it felt good to be in her company. He even shared her bed. He felt strange and alive and more of a man afterward somehow.

Ultimately, he had cast aside his preconceptions of what was right and trusted his internal guidance system. Still, he prayed for a mutually respectful outcome.

So it was with considerable relief that he received the news that she too saw their relationship best in terms of friendship. Such freedom! Exactly as he had wished for. No burden, no restrictions. Growth, and new beginnings.

His life was an enormous sea stretching out before him. What awaited him tomorrow? It was as if he were opening a puzzle box inside himself, revealing new layers each day.

Yet, strangely, paradoxically, he could almost see the entire picture, only without a specific timeline or the detailed steps involved.

Something seemed to be steering him in a wonderfully perfect direction, and it wasn't his conscious mind.

Some said it was the higher self, or oversoul. Perhaps it was.

The woman he had seen in the garden had given him a glimpse into a different sort of life. One with seduction and the elegant grace of stillness. Bodies weathered by choices and the sun. Of a lifetime of energy, compiled into one more in command of their destiny.

It made his head spin and gave him pause.

He could feel the veil of illusion dissipating slowly, the infinite reach of eternal consciousness just on the edge of his perception.

What would it be like to float in that sea of knowledge? To comprehend the soul, the higher self, reality as it was in the largest most profound sense? To be the intelligence behind it all and grasp godhead?

He thought he might like to know. He thought perhaps he would find out.

## Chapter 18

Tysha stared at herself in the mirror. Her small brown eyes flecked with gold seemed somewhat severe compared to the fine beauty of her lips and slender figure. Almost everything about her was quick movements and fine lines. She even joked to herself that her breasts had as little patience as she had, and that's why they hadn't grown as large as some of the other girls. Still, she knew from experience she was quite desirable to members of both sexes. Not that she was really trying to please anyone else. She just liked to know she could get that kind of attention if she wanted to.

There really wasn't anything she could see that was out of place. Maybe a mole or two here, a couple of slightly pointy elbows, knees dusty from strolling through the streets of Jon'Blor, and a tiny bit of excess fat from indulging in one too many feem cakes. But still, a pretty picture nonetheless.

Satisfied that she could carry a pleasing mental image of herself throughout the day, Tysha clothed herself in her service uniform and stepped out from behind a red velvet curtain. Ostensibly she had gone into the fitting room to try on some Neelonder spark suit – equally fitting for a dancehall or a firefight. The glittering gemstones would dazzle anyone, which could mean attracting an amorous eye or distracting a vengeful one.

What Tysha had really wanted, however, was some time to assess herself. She felt somewhat out of sorts wearing her uniform amidst the soft pastels and shining neon hues of the locals. She thought maybe a little ego boost could help.

“And what do you think of the dress, my dear?” The clothing merchant asked gratifyingly.

“I suppose I don't really -,” she hesitated.

*Well, what the hell, you only visit Jon'Blor every so often.*

“Actually, I'll take it,” Tysha declared.

“Excellent! I'll have it wrapped up for you.”

“Thanks.”

Maybe she'd surprise Rax with it later. That crazy spacenut might just be able to focus on one thing and one thing only for a change then.

Tysha smiled to herself as she walked out of the shop.

Outside, many people strolled the streets, some holding hands, others engaged in passionate conversation, some just window shopping and soaking up the sun. Psychics, energy healers, sound chambers, massage parlors, and pleasure palaces all lined the streets. One could easily spend several days fine tuning their physical, emotional, mental, and etheric bodies here.

Tysha had a personal fondness for astrologers and psychics. She thought that the idea of a personality crafted by the stars and the ability to see inside one's identity and true aspects was very interesting. Often the insights she received were very useful, but if nothing else, it was a fun game to play.

Sometimes she could even feel something close to reverence when a particularly attuned clairvoyant could touch upon something that resonated so profoundly with her being it made her feel as if a magical doorway had opened in the world. She could step through and find her true self standing and looking at the universe, ready to seize her life and fulfill her destiny.

*Maybe today's a good day to step through one of those doors.*

With that in mind, she set off down the street in search of a psychic that felt right to her.

Doorways painted with images of the moon, windows depicting wheels of the zodiac, and flashing stars sprung up all around her, but none of them felt right somehow.

Finally, as she was about to give up, she came upon a small yellow house with a laughing sun hanging above the doorway.

“Trix's Gateway to the Sun”, read the sign in welcoming letters.

Tysha closed her eyes and asked herself if this place felt right.

As if in answer, she received a rush of excitedly pleasant emotion running through her body.

*This is the one.*

So she stepped across the threshold and into the kingdom of the sun.

## Chapter 19

Jorral headed down the boulevard towards the artificer. Tracking them down had been easier than he'd have guessed, given that there were numerous crafters of crystal ware in Gireeti, the main neighborhood of the capital city.

After realizing there were hundreds within the capital city, Jorral threw up his hands and said, "Please, deliver me some sort of sign to find the artificer meant for me."

As his exasperation faded into subdued relaxation, he began to feel calmer. He decided to walk down the boulevard a while and see what there was to be seen on this planet.

Everywhere he looked were meditation centers and schools for the development of psychic abilities, such as clairvoyance, remote viewing, and channeling. He passed an education center for young ones. An older woman was showing the children the fruit of a slender yellow tree. The tree's magnificent and fine branches twisted in ways that made Jorral marvel.

The children gazed happily at the teacher as she opened the fruit to reveal the juicy pink flesh and bright blue seeds inside. The sight made Jorral's mouth water. The teacher passed the fruit around and let each child take a slice of the fruit. Gasps of delight and pleasure escaped from the children's mouths as they bit into the tender fruit.

The teacher seemed very pleased with her flock and herself. She then passed out a seed to each child and led them towards a patch of bare earth where they could plant the azure seeds.

*Thus the cycle of life continues, and these young ones give rise to new ideas, hands that will shape this world and perhaps many others.*

Lost in his revelry, Jorral did not see the little troupe of girls approach him until they were upon him.

"Excuse me, sir?" One of the little girls chimed politely.

Jorral was startled out of his musings.

"Ah, hello there! How are you?" Jorral replied.

"Fine, thank you. We were wondering, well..." she said a bit bashfully, hands hidden behind her back as she made circles on the ground with her toe.

"Yes, what can I do for you?" He said with a broad smile sweeping across his face. The scene with the children had put him in a very happy mood.

"Well, since you asked...we're offering crystal bracelets for those who want them, sir," said another of the little girls, a blonde with blue skin and a line of black dots down the center of her forehead.

"Would you like to see?" added the first of the troupe, a tiny girl of perhaps nine, raven black hair fluttering in the wind, long eyelashes stemming from pink eyelids that covered brilliant sapphire eyes.

"Of course, I'd love to," Jorral replied.

The girl revealed her hands from behind her back and offered a shimmering set of purple stones interlaced in a loop for Jorral's viewing pleasure.

"It looks lovely! May I try it on?"

"Of course, sir."

"Jorral, please," he corrected gently.

"Jorral," she repeated. "I think it would look lovely on you."

Jorral threaded his sinewy hand through the loop. The gems sparkled in the sunlight as he turned the bracelet this way and that.

"It is lovely, you were right."

“You may have it if you wish, Jorral,” the first girl said.

“Really? Why, that's wonderful!” he exclaimed. “But what can I offer you in return?”

“Well, my aunt Reletha made that bracelet, you see. It would be awfully nice if you could pay her a visit. Her shop is called The Blue Lagoon. It's just down the street, next to the Clapping Dragon herbal boutique.”

Jorral's smile seemed to grow even wider.

“Why I think I shall do just that. Thank you very much, miss...?”

“Zera. Zera Menola. Pleasure to meet you, Jorral.”

“And you as well, Zera.”

*Time to visit the artificer. Nice to know I'm being heard out there.*

## Chapter 20

The room was lit only by an array of candles. Red ones, blue ones, tall cylindrical ones, dripping orbs of wax. If there was a type of candle made on this planet, it had to be found here, Tysha thought.

The air smelled of spice and rose petals. Soft chimes sounded from somewhere in back. "Hello, my dear, please have a seat," said a middle aged woman with shoulder length hair. She wore a pale yellow tunic with a brown and green vest over it. Her fingernails were painted blue, her hair was as black as her eyes and fell straight down past her shoulders. She had a kindly face lined with the occasional wrinkle, telling of her wisdom and experience. Her face sang as she smiled, and her arms cut gracefully through the air as she beckoned Tysha to a chair opposite her.

Tysha accepted the offer and eased into a comfortable mahogany chair, well worn from use. It felt like sitting in her favorite chair back home, even though she was miles away on a strange and distant planet.

"Welcome. My name is Magdala, and may I ask, who might you be, dear?" The psychic spoke with much cheer and a voice that sounded like crackling twigs in autumn.

"My name is Tysha."

"Pleased to meet you, Tysha. Now tell me, what can I do for you today?"

"Well, I didn't really have anything in particular in mind exactly. You see, I'm traveling from a far away planet called Zior. We're on a mission of sorts. I've just always been interested in what a reading can offer."

"Very well, I understand." Magdala then closed her eyes and took a deep breathe. The air was very still except for the flickering of the candles.

"I see you are on some sort of voyage, as you say. You are quick witted, and spirited as well. You like a good game but sometimes feel as though you have to fight for what you want or stick up for yourself. Not just occasionally, but *frequently*."

Tysha moved in her seat.

*Well, that does strike a chord within me.*

"What I'd like you to know, is that you *can relax*. It is within your power, and indeed safe, to come out of your shell. As you do so, your beauty will be more apparent to all, and you will attract others who recognize you for who you really are. They will respect you more for your gentle courage than your warrior's stance, in fact."

*Hmmm, I wonder what sort of lover that might attract.*

"You are a navigator or sorts, yes?"

"Yes. I'm the ship's pilot," Tysha answered.

"Good. You are very skilled at navigating in unfamiliar territory. Yet you needn't always be at the helm in your private affairs. It is important that you release the grip you have on yourself and let down your defenses. Then you shall see there was really nothing to fear after all. Does that make sense, dear?" Magdala smiled, great compassion showing on her face.

"Well, yes, I suppose it does. I just don't want anyone thinking they can take advantage of me."

"And they won't if you are true to yourself, dear. Besides, you can always take back control if you need to."

"I suppose that's true. I never thought of it that way." Tysha felt part of her being shifting. It was as if a knot she hadn't even recognized before had suddenly begun to loosen on its own.

"You are a warrior, but you are also a princess. What is more, you carry your child self inside you as well." Magdala paused thoughtfully. "I sense you were hurt long ago, somehow. A part of that



wound may have never fully healed, child.”

Tysha shifted uncomfortably in her seat, attempting to recall her past.

Magdala held up a hand.

“It's not important right now how you were hurt. What is important is recognizing that it doesn't have to be that way from here on out. You are always safe if you let yourself be.”

Tysha liked the sound of that. Outside she heard the sound of a transport passing by.

“I sense deep change is afoot for you, dear,” Magdala continued, “sweeping change that moves inexorably forward, like a river winding towards the sea.”

*Deep change..*

“I also sense a lover may be entering your life soon.”

*Does she mean Rax?* Tysha wondered happily.

“I see...well, this is somewhat strange, but there are to be three different men in your life. Yet, somehow, they are all connected. Interesting...”

At that, Tysha had to laugh. “Don't worry, I know who you're talking about.”

Magdala smiled at the joyfully girlish expression on Tysha's face.

“Very well, I'm not certain what will happen with these men, or is it only one man? In any case, I believe it wise to let yourself explore this love you have, but remember to focus on the release and your newfound sense of freedom, whatever may happen. Break free of any limitations caused by any ideas that you are unworthy of love. You are very much worth loving, and are indeed loved very much. Have faith, and everything will turn out just fine.”

Tysha breathed deeply and let out a long, luxurious sigh. Oh how she would love to be loved by Rax. To roll around in his bed and have him devour her. Maybe this letting go thing could really work out.

“Do you have any questions for me, dear?” Magdala once again produced a gentle smile. Her face was the definition of serenity and nurturing love.

“Well, I am wondering about this journey I am on...”

“Ah yes, an important undertaking to be sure. Let's see, what does this event signify for you, Tysha?”

## Chapter 21

The Blue Lagoon was a rather small shop tucked in between a card reader and a yoga studio. Still, size doesn't always account for everything. The sign was wrought in fine, cheerful print. An image of a placid lagoon was carved in wood next to the letters. Numerous carved crystals were displayed in the window, ranging from the beautiful, to the merely interesting. Soft late afternoon sunlight flowed towards the shop, reminding Jorral of all the mystery and subtle adventure of a late summer's day.

The door was open, so Jorral invited himself in. A hidden trigger set off a kind of high-pitched whirring sound that led up to a clear ping like the sound of a small metal bell.

Alerted to Jorral's presence, an older man came forward to greet him.

"Hello, may I help you with anything today, friend?"

The man wore thin rimmed, gold-plated spectacles over beady black eyes. He wore beige trousers and a clean yellow dress shirt under a brown vest. The wrinkles and loose skin of his face revealed his age, but he had a very warm and kindly disposition.

"Yes, please. I'm looking for someone named Reletha," Jorral began, "her niece gave me this." Jorral held the bracelet up to the light and shook it so the man could see.

"Ah yes, amethyst. Quite lovely. Reletha?" The man called out towards the back of the shop. "Are you back there?"

Jorral heard the sounds of movement from the back of the room. It sounded like someone reluctantly easing themselves out of a very old and comfortable chair.

"Yes, yes, I am coming."

The old man smiled at Jorral. Soon a woman appeared. She was in her later years as well, but she still possessed a full head of gorgeous black hair, unlike the man, who was balding on top.

She wore bright blue jewels as earrings and a necklace of pearls. Her dress was made from twisting floral patterns in blues, yellows, and greens. She moved somewhat slowly, as if in a bit of a daze, but her eyes reflected intelligence.

"Yes, what is it, dear?"

"You have a visitor, it would seem," the old man replied with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh?" Reletha's eyes seemed to brighten at the prospect, her mouth curving into an 'O' of surprise.

"My name is Jorral. I was told by your niece that you might welcome a visit."

Reletha eyed Jorral a bit strangely, but her lips produced a wry smile all the same.

"Did she? Well, it is nice to have someone other than Bernal and myself in the shop. Tell me, Jorral, do you have any interest in crystal work?"

"I do, in fact. On Zior, we use them for all manner things. Healings, divining, enlightening our energetic bodies, powering our technology. I myself use them most when I need to enhance the power of my voice." Jorral's dark eyes danced as he spoke to the shopkeepers.

"Ah yes, crystals are very useful for that. What exactly is it that you do then?"

"Well, I myself am a singer. I create melodies and stories out of ideas pulled from the fabric of reality. I spin visions into words and sound. Sometimes the crystals can help in amplifying the signal of a particular emotional tone or in creating energetic harmonies that paint a new picture for my audience or patient."

"Yes, I see. Well, we certainly have many crystals that might suit that purpose. Would you care to see them?"

Not knowing exactly what he was doing here other than following the rainbow and seeing where it led, Jorral assented.

“Here we have an array of fine Tourmaline, Amethyst, and Sapphire crystals which you may be interested in. They may be used to instill energetic patterns into any substance, including the etheric, for a variety purposes. But what am I saying?” Reletha caught herself and shook her head. “You probably knew that already,” she said with a wave of her hand.

“It never hurts to have a friendly reminder,” Jorral replied patiently.

“Yes, well, is there anything in particular you'd like to see, Jorral?”

Jorral thought for a moment before something clicked in his mind. Inspired, he said, “Do you have anything *unusual*, perhaps?”

“Unusual eh? Well, let's see.” Reletha tapped a finger to her chin before her eyes lit up.

“Ah yes! We do have something unusual, perhaps. I can't be certain you don't have such an object on your world, but let us just see.”

She guided Jorral over to the corner of the shop closest to the front display window. Sunlight filtered through the glass, bursting through the various gems, creating a twisting orgy of dazzling lightwork. Jorral felt a bit as though he were traveling through a magical land. He could almost hear the crystals singing, so high was their energy.

Finally, Reletha grabbed a spherical gem made of completely clear material and produced it for Jorral.

“This is they eye of Balor,” she said with a proud smile. “Within you may catch a glimpse of the world currently inhabited by any other being you wish.”

Reletha turned the sphere around in her hands, letting the light shine through it in a network of illumination. Within, Jorral saw only reflected light, but the purity of the orb was rather striking.

“Hmm, somewhat like a collective meditation?” Jorral asked, his lips pursued together, brows arched quizzically.

“In a sense, yes, but with the orb you don't need to meditate beforehand. Neither do you require the other person you wish to view. Of course, I needn't tell you it should only be used for higher purposes.”

“Of course. It does seem unique. I've never heard of anything quite like it before.”

“You are pleased then?” Reletha asked hopefully.

“I am. Thank you. May I try it?”

“I don't see why not,” Reletha replied with a shrug, slowly handing the sphere over to Jorral. “Just close your eyes and feel the sphere's energy. Good. Now, simply think of who you wish to see.”

Jorral thought for a minute. His first instinct was to think of Ninnia. He has missed her these last few days, and would welcome a chance to connect. Something inside him, however, caused him to hesitate.

*Who should I visit?*

For some reason he might never understand, the ship's navigator's face floated into his mind.

*Very well, show me Tysha then.*

Suddenly, Jorral felt as though he were being pulled into a very strong current. A nebulous haze came before his eyes and he found himself falling through swirling rings of smoke. Soon the clouds parted, and he could see a young woman sitting in a chair. It was Tysha. She seemed to be talking to another woman.

Jorral heard the other woman speaking, but her words seemed jumbled. Instead of coherent speech, Jorral was greeted with flashes of lightning, the view of space from onboard the *Light Bearer*, and an image of Tysha entwined in love.

Jorral felt that perhaps it was not his business to see this, but something within urged that he press on.

He heard Tysha's laugh, and saw her face fill with joy. Then the image shattered to reveal a sky filled with rolling blue clouds and purple lightning. He and Tysha were standing side by side on a strange, rocky planet, and in the skies a voice came calling down.

“Arise, Jorral, your time has come.”

Suddenly Jorral jerked back into the present. The vision collapsed, and he nearly dropped the orb.

“Saw something, did you, Jorral?” Reletha gazed intently into his eyes. “Fear not, all will be well. All futures have not yet come to be, and you may yet come to realize that this vision is really a blessing in disguise.”

Jorral let out a long breathe of air.

“Yes, perhaps you are right. I just wasn't prepared for the *realness* of the vision.”

Reletha laughed. “Yes, the eye does have that effect on people sometimes.”

“Thank you for sharing this with me. I feel it was important that I saw all that somehow.”

“The pleasure is mine. We exist to serve and to share. The orb was simply collecting dust where it sat. You have given us a gift as well today.”

Jorral smiled and slightly bowed his muscular frame, his long black hair sweeping across the floor.

“It is good to hear. Still, I think I should be going now. I would like to find my traveling companions.”

“Yes, I suppose you would. Please, take the orb with you. If you should ever have need of it, I would like to think that it is in your hands.”

“That is most kind of you Reletha. Thank you both. Farewell.”

Jorral stepped out of the shop, somewhat dizzy from all that had happened that day. He tried to let the vision rest a while, so he could focus on finding Tysha. Maybe she could shed some light on this situation.

## Chapter 22

Light filled Lexi's eyes as he stared into the pool. Visions filled his head, dreams born on particles of light.

He carefully considered all the many worlds that sprang up behind his eyes. Worlds of song, great winged creatures as large as a house, a world of hanging gardens, and still others born of lava, metal, rock. Others gripped in the culmination of various machinist's fantasies. Technology devouring the landscape, yet functioning in some sort of artificial harmony.

To what end do all these worlds go? What shapes their destiny?

Further still, worlds gripped in spiritual fervor. Slow writhings of ecstasy and halls of the devout chanting sacred venerations.

*A good craftsman hones his tools and understands his purpose.*

So he let the visions roll before him. Lexi saw each one as a possible, perhaps already real world. He felt he had some great part to play in the future of Zior, and possibly the universe at large. So it was that he allowed as yet unreal fragments of other times fill his mind. Thus he filled himself with contrast and stimulation.

"A good craftsman also learns when to get out of his own way, and let the world outside unfold around him."

Lexi turned to see his master gazing at him with a trace of mirth and perhaps, was that? Yes, sadness.

"Master Drael, I did not hear you come in."

"No, clearly you did not. All the more reason to point out that sometimes it is necessary to step back from the logical vision of a grand plan and simply flow into the stream of your life."

"But what if I make a mistake?"

Drael laughed out loud.

"My dear, sweet boy! Mistake? There is no such thing as a mistake! The universe functions perfectly as it is, always and forever more. What could you hope to break or unbreak? Reality itself?"

"Well, no, I hadn't thought of it like that," Lexi began, pouting slightly. "It just seems as if there could perhaps be one perfect world, and I wish to help shape it into being."

"Indeed? Perhaps there are many worlds that could be considered perfect. Is it up to us to decide what shall and shall not exist?"

Lexi pondered Drael's statement for a moment.

"I confess, I am unsure, master."

"Well, that is alright. We are all still learning, yes? Or did you expect to understand the totality of existence all in this single lifetime, indeed, perhaps in this very night, gazing into that pool?"

Drael smiled fondly at Lexi, adding warmth to the cold logic with which he penetrated Lexi's mental framework.

*So young, yet so bent on fulfilling his destiny and saving our world. If only...*

"Lexi, my boy, why don't we take a walk outside? It is a lovely day, after all."

"Very well, master. I suppose I've seen enough of the universe and its infinite unfolding for today." Lexi smiled then, revealing a bit of the youthful twinkle that had so charmed the few girls he had cared to reveal his inner self to.

*A bit of the stone rolls away today, and who knows what is driving this boy? I've not seen many with his single-minded passion. Not since...*

Drael had known the world of walls and darkness. Had seen homes turned to ash and personal quests sacrificed to artificial gods of both material and psychic origin. Then came the days of change.

Visions of surrender, surrender to love and noble purpose. It was as if all the fire and raging construction of the past had led to the great sigh of relief that came when society collapsed into the ocean of peace Zior currently resided under. And burning through the walls of ignorance, a shapeshifting beacon of hope like none before, or since.

## Chapter 23

“Take this wrench,” the short, muscular man in a grey and blue sleeveless jumpsuit said curtly. A whirling blur of motion took the tool from his hand.

The man in the jumpsuit was hunched over a console depicting an image of the *Light Bearer*. The monolithic ship was shown as a waveform image with numerous glowing lights. He selected one of these lights, and a portion of the ship became magnified on the screen.

“Hmmm, looks like the radial magnets are a little out of wack in sector 92-A5. You better go have a look, Doc,” he said to another equally thin man. This man was bald, and wore spectacles, a tight fitting black rubber suit, and a serious and somewhat sad face.

“Must I always take on the menial tasks?” The doctor said somewhat peevisly.

“That's practically what this job *is*, Doc,” the first man replied. He was young, but possessed what could generally be called rugged good looks. This feature was somewhat enhanced by a definite neglect of shaving implements during the last several days, and a mop of mildly unkempt, yet not unpleasing dirty blonde hair set atop a finely wrought face somewhat spoiled by the scowl it now supported.

“Nuts and bolts ain't exactly flashy hypercars and safaris into alien oceans, but it's what we're here to do, for now. Besides...”

“I know, I know, it'll be worth it,” the doctor answered testily, holding up his hands.

“Weeee, that was fun!” The whirling blur said as it spun up to the man at the console.

“Fix that ventilator did ya?”

“Yep yep yep yep! Sure did chief!” The blue whir had now materialized into something more Ziorian looking. It now possessed a face, with bright blue skin, dark beady eyes, and a happy and contented smile. He was still buzzing slightly, so his body was outlined by a shadow image of itself that twitched like a swarm of bees.

“Always the eager one,” the man said with a hint of fondness, the kind one often shows towards a pet.

“See if you can't help me put Jeffri's sky box back together, will ya?”

“Sure thing, sure thing!”

Together they went over to a pile of busted up blocks, sticks, wires, and circuit boards.

“What a mess,” the man said with a shake of the head. “Kid's got spirit, but his hands are so clumsy.”

“Justa kid, boss!” the energetic blue guy said with gusto.

“Yeah, you're right. Can't be easy bein' all small and innocent.”

The man held what looked like the nose of a tiny spaceship up to a stray copper wire.

“Let's see, how can we fix this thing...think this end goes here...”

Suddenly, the blue one went into a flash of motion. Hands whirred like miniature tornadoes, and his face became like a screaming gust of wind as he went to work.

Within seconds, he was done.

“Ta-da!” the blue guy proclaimed merrily.

Where before there was only a pile of what could affectionately be termed junk, there now stood a network of beams formed into the shape of a tower. In the center, a rocket was transfixed, nozzle pointed up towards the heavens.

“Show off,” the man grunted.

The blue one just beamed at him with his smiling line of pearly white teeth. Energy seemed to buzz vibrantly off of him.

“What now, boss?” the blue one asked.

“Well, I suppose we could stand with a break. We've been at it all day. Though I don't suppose *you're* too tired, are ya, friend?”

“Nope, not really tired, boss!” he replied enthusiastically.

“Well, *this* guy could sure use some grub in the ol' tum, that's for sure.”

The man put on a battered brown vest and headed out of the workroom and into the hallway.

Together they walked toward the messhall. To their left, numerous windows gave them a view of the planet Jon'Blor. They were docked at the capital's main space and airport. Ships from all over the universe were docked here. The one taking up a sizable portion of the viewing space from the vantage point of the *Light Bearer* was a long and thin vessel made of translucent sky blue material. Thin beings with skin as black as the void of space and elongated limbs could be seen roaming the ship through the hull.

The man aboard the *Light Bearer* glanced at these beings in a mixture of curiosity and longing that bubbled up from beneath the surface of his usually gruff and stubborn demeanor. He was a man who remembered the world as it was, and thought perhaps it still had some work to do before he felt completely healed. Sometimes he felt that his interactions with the world and others seemed overly gruff. But that was just his way of turning seriousness on its head. If you could be a bit of a hard case on the outside but still remember the taste of freedom and a sky that stretched forever, you were doing alright, he thought. Still, he sometimes felt as though all he wanted to do was pursue childish fantasies of exploring other worlds, other skies, until the day he was called back to the sky from which he was born.

Soon they reached the mess hall, and thoughts of more practical concerns filled his head.

Many other Ziorians were gathered together to eat and share each others' company as well. The man wouldn't easily be termed a socialite, but he enjoyed the company of others as much as anyone else.

He and the blue one each grabbed a bowl from a stack by the entrance. Then they walked in front of a large planter box attached to the wall. Within grew a vast array of leafy green plants. Long, thin green stalks offered wavy green leaves for the taking. Tiny clusters of twisting vines produced little heart-shaped leaves. Spiraling vegetation sprouted all manner of edible greens in the form of arrowheads, crescent moons, long tendrils, and many other varieties besides.

The companions grabbed a few handfuls of some of their favorites and moved on to the next box. Here grew any number of vegetables, from roots, to blubs, and cruciferous vegetables. Here also grew fruits of the less sweet orders. Red bell-shaped peppers, succulent green orbs, and elongated purple ellipses.

Throughout the room grew a number of fruiting trees. Luscious pink, orange, red, and green fruits hung from thick and spindly branches, tantalizing the man and his companion with their luster.

The men selected a couple of different varieties each, peeling the outer skins and depositing chunks of the juicy fruits inside their bowls.

The only thing left to add (and this was entirely optional, depending on how decadent you were feeling) was a bit of dressing. If you were craving something simple, or were in a hurry, you could just grab one of the sour blue fruits, slice it open with a crysknife and squeeze. But if you felt like adding a bit of zest to your meal, you could stop by Salek's dressing bar.

Salek was the head chef onboard the *Light Bearer*. Since he was a boy, he had been delighting the taste buds of everyone whom he had prepared food for. His sauces were the stuff of legend. Strange, yet astonishingly pleasing creations that combined tastes as diverse as the rich velvety cream of the chocoberry with the pungent sting of the ginging root. Tasting one of the sauces was like delving into a pool that appeared placid on the surface, but was filled with orgasmically warm water, sensual massaging devices, and tickling machines.

The man in the brown vest was not one to turn down one of Salek's sauces, ever. His mouth



watered as he drizzled a spoonful of the orange-brown liquid of the day over his meal. The blue guy licked his lips as he did the same, his buzzing blue hand spattering sauce all over his food.

“Mmm-mmm! Delicious!” the man said, licking some of the sauce off of his finger.

“Yep yep!” the blue one agreed merrily.

The duo then made their way towards the base of one of the trees. There sat a number of their fellow crew persons.

“Hey there, Katal, how's it hangin'?” the man in the vest greeted one of the others.

“Well hello there, Rax! I'm good, how bout you and blue there?” Katal replied. He was a portly man with a jolly face and a thin beard that grew across his cream colored face.

“We're peachy. Food looks delish today.”

“When doesn't it?” Katal said with a laugh.

Long ago those of Zior had learned that all they needed in the way of food could be found growing all around them in its natural state. Food that was picked while it was still alive offered an amazingly high concentration of energy and nutrients. Not to mention the fine energy signatures of various minerals siphoned from the soil and stored within the plant.

Rax could feel the energy of his meal coursing through his body. He was always extremely grateful for the interplay of taste and color that filled him with delight, for the vortex of life force that flowed within him and sustained him.

“Lovely planet, from the looks of it,” Katal observed as he munched happily on his salad.

“Can't say I've seen much of it, myself. Been busy putting together ships large and small,” Rax replied with a wry smile. “Besides, every time I gaze out of the window my eyes end up getting glued to that alien ship out there.”

“Oh, you mean the Neruxian vessel?”

“That what they're called?” Rax shrugged. “That translucent hull is awe inspiring. It's like a dream come to life.”

“I hope you aren't thinking of leaving the *Light Bearer* for greener pastures,” Katal teased.

“Course not. Here's home. Besides, who'd keep 'er runnin' if not me?” Rax retorted with a grin.

“How bout you, Blue?” Katal inquired.

“I'm happy here!” he chirped, sending bits of vegetation flying out of his mouth.

“You're happy anywhere, buddy,” Rax said with a short laugh. “Hell, you'd be happy in a Vroltor bee hive, stingers the size of a fist and all.”

Katal laughed heartily at that.

“How do you do it, Blue?”

“Jus bein' me!” His beady black eyes danced as he spoke. His smile never wavered, even for an instant.

“He's a fountain of energy, that one,” Rax remarked.

They ate their food in silence for a while then. Soft electronic music mixed with the chimes of crystals filled the air around them. Natural sunlight from the world outside spilled in from the windows along the walls and a large skylight that occupied most of the ceiling.

The group chatted amiably about the activities of the day as they finished consuming their nourishing food.

“Ahhh..that was tasty.” Rax let out a sigh of delight as he patted his full belly.

“Mmmmmhmmm,” Blue chimed in.

“All a growing Ziorian needs,” Katal joked, his jowls jiggling as he spoke.

Rax gave a chuckle as he again patted his belly. “Growing in some ways, anyway.”

Katal smiled. Delighting in the pleasure of a life-giving meal and appreciating the continued existence that carried one through this plane of reality was a joy every Ziorian, young or old, could count on.

After resting a while to digest their food and soak in some of the sun's rays, Katal said, “Well,

I'm off to the engine room.”

“Nice seeing ya friend,” Rax said as they gathered each other in a firm and loving embrace.

“Well, buddy, guess you and me better go and see what number 3's up to.”

“Aye, aye, Cap'n!”

Rax smiled at his blue friend.

*Never gets tired of smiling, that one. Good vibe to have around.*

As they arrived back in their workroom, they found Doc waiting for them.

“Hey, Doc, whats the word?” Rax asked cheerfully.

“Ah, everything's fine with the radial magnets, if that's what you're wondering,” Doc answered.

Rax then turned his attention to the child at the doctor's feet. Little Jeffri was playing gleefully with his spaceship.

“Zoouooooomm,” Jeffri sounded as he flew the toy ship through the air.

*Looks like a job well done.* Rax thought to himself.

## Chapter 24

As she started to come out of the trance state induced by her reading, Tysha shook off the haze around her eyes and tried to perceive her reality as best she could.

Such information. Rumbblings of something different. So many choices. Hallways of infinite mirrors! Chained phantasms and a whisper in the night.

But still, something to do with Rax perhaps? Dare she let herself even think that? Well, why not? No reason not to give in to her dreams and fantasies. To believe that one can have and achieve their dreams is bliss. Just wake up, be who you are, do what you feel, enjoy every moment. Freedom, such a precious thing.

There will be many detours and distractions, but you've got to stay focused on the love and light.

Something major was going to happen on this journey. It had to, or they'd never be able to save the dreams of Zior.

Tysha slowly swiveled her head around as the door to the shop opened suddenly. She felt Jorral's presence before she saw him.

*Why do I feel as if he has a sort of role in what just happened? Almost like he was in the vision with me.*

“Hello, Tysha. I...apologize for interrupting. But I believe it is time we left Jon'Blor,” Jorral said as he swept his gaze up from the floor to meet Tysha's eyes. To Tysha, Jorral came off as feeling a bit bashful for some reason.

“So soon? We're just getting started here,” Tysha replied, not comprehending Jorral's haste.

“Yes, I know. It is very sudden,” Jorral began gently. “Still, I feel in my heart that it is best. I'd be happy to explain more.” Jorral glanced towards the psychic.

“In any case, Tysha, we are finished, and I believe you have other matters to attend to,” Magdala, the psychic, declared.

“Yes, well, thank you for everything,” Tysha replied dreamily. She was still in a bit of a state of shock.

“Are you alright, Tysha? You seem a bit disconcerted,” Jorral asked softly.

“No, I'm – I'm fine, thanks. Let's get back to the ship.”

Jorral replied with a slight nod.

“Thanks again Magdala,” Tysha called with an airy smile.

“The pleasure is all mine, dear. Just remember what we talked about, and you will be fine.”

“Yes, I will,” Tysha said, brightening and standing just a little more erect.

## Chapter 25

“So we're leaving then?”

Tysha and Jorral were walking down the main street of the capital towards one of the transport stations. The air was filled with the sounds of a populace exploding with life. It was a hot and dusty day, but that suited the travelers just fine, as they were used to warmer climes.

“I feel it is best, yes.” Jorral seemed a bit shaken up, yet he was still a picture of calm in most respects. His energy was carved in the image of solid earth, with all his nervousness wafting about him in airy waves.

Ninnia had always seen him as the rock that holds while the waves break upon the shore. No matter what the storm brought, he would be there at the end, standing tall, a serene and proud warrior of the spirit.

Tysha gave a slight murmur in response. She was still slightly dazed and a bit distracted by thoughts of Rax.

*Stay focused Tysha, what will be will be.*

“And where are we supposed to point our ship towards then?”

“I am not sure. I may need help with that.” Jorral paused to reflect before adding, “I have a bit of a confession to make, Tysha.”

She looked at him strangely, but not unkindly.

“Go on then...” She paused in the busy street to give her full attention to what Jorral had to say.

Jorral began to tell Tysha of how he met the artificer, of the orb, of his shared vision centered around her.

“So you saw some of my reading?” Tysha asked, looking Jorral in the eyes.

Jorral let out a sigh. “Yes. Please forgive me. I can't quite explain it, but I felt guided to use the orb to view your activities.”

Tysha let out a little whistle of air through her nostrils.

“Well, I can't say I'm thrilled, but if your feelings told you that's what was best, perhaps there was a very compelling reason for you to do what you did. What did you see, exactly?”

Jorral smiled sheepishly and shuffled his feet a little. “Thank you for your understanding. One thing I experienced that was very powerful during the vision was the sense of an important meeting to come. A rocky world engulfed in purple fog and a man's voice calling out to me. I don't know who this man is, but I believe he is expecting us.”

“Mmm...what do you think we should do?”

“I think we should try to find this man. Perhaps he holds the key for what we seek.”

“Well, I can't say it's a bad idea. I'm just the pilot, in any case. You tell me where to go, and I'll fly us there.”

“That's very gracious of you.” Jorral smiled. “Let us return to the ship then. Perhaps we can find more information in the astrometrics lab.”

Then it was Tysha's turn to smile. “Good idea. I think I know someone who can help us with our search too.”

## Chapter 26

“This way children!”

Lexi was leading a group of youngsters down a spiraling staircase cut from stone. The steps were set into the side of a cliff that wove its way inexorably down towards the sea.

To their left, waves broke gently on the soft sand of Zior. Gulls called overhead, and crabs wandered to and fro along the beach, their purple claws striped with streaks of blue held aloft as they snapped at the air.

Lexi was perhaps ten years older than the eldest child in the group. Part of the educational tradition of Zior called for the elder students to pass some of their knowledge on to the younger generation. In this way, their own education would be reinforced, and they would bestow the seeds of knowledge to the future inheritors of Zior.

Lexi was often surprised at how much insight could be gained from simply opening oneself up to youth and trying to offer some form of guidance.

*They are so very full of energy, still quite shapeless in many ways. Budding branches in the dawn.*

Along the way, children 'oohed' and 'aahed' at the different plants growing along the cliff.

“As you will probably notice, there is a great deal of moisture and sunlight to be found here,” Lexi told the children circling around him. “That makes it very easy for many of these plants to grow. Now, can anyone point out any of these species for me?”

A small, round boy's hand shot into the air.

“Ooh! I know, Mr. Lexi!” the child shouted. His eyes were as round and full as Atraxas, the moon of Zior.

“Yes, Colern?” Colern had wavy orange hair and soft rosy skin. His face was full of cheer, and puffed up slightly like a cloud. He was a very happy boy.

“It's a spine-berry plant!” he exclaimed gleefully.

“Very good!” Lexi returned, allowing a wan smile to move across his face.

Colern beamed as he swayed to and fro, squirming hands placed behind his back.

“And what do we Ziorians use it for?” Lexi leaned forward ever so slightly as he hovered over the group, scanning for someone who might answer him. He seemed almost angelic, with his beaming smile and long, flowing blonde hair. But his demeanor was perhaps a touch too serious to really reveal all of Lexi's shining potential.

A little girl with jet black hair cautiously lifted her hand.

“Yes, Jalova?”

“Mmm, we use the berries for juice, or for lunch, or snacks.” She became more and more relaxed, more excited as she talked. Her teeth stuck out a little, as did her pale turquoise eyes. “They're good for the heart, our blood, and they help our bodies relax when we're stretching. And, um...” She frowned ever so slightly, forgetting her words and lightly wringing her hands.

“Go on, dear,” Lexi gently urged her on.

Jalova's eyes shot out once again. “And the greens are edible too! They have lots of good minerals and vitamins for our bodies. And the green parts are also good for our lungs, helping us breathe and ingest more clean air so we can function better.”

“Excellent! You know quite a lot about this plant it seems, Jalova.”

Jalova flashed a quick smile and bounced a little with joy. Her eyes twinkled like the light shining off the waves of a pale blue green sea.

“Come now, class, it's down to the gardens for us.”

The children shouted with glee at the notion. It was all Lexi could do to stay ahead of the group and keep the little ones from bounding off the cliffside.

As they wound their way down towards the base of the cliffs, they could start to make out the gardening complex below. Glass walls curved around to form a semi-circular compound. Inside, rows and rows of plants of all varieties could be seen.

The scenery along the cliffside was changing as well. Here grew mostly purple and reddish scrubs and vines, home to masses of tiny red spiders and other insects. Here too crawled spotted lizard-like creatures with eight legs and two heads balanced on slender green necks. Their bodies were a roiling torrent of color, all the way down to the spiked yellow-orange of their tails. Lavender colored eyes darted to and fro as the children marched on towards the garden by the sea.

When at last they arrived at the base of the cliffs, they were met by a thin woman in her middle years. She had wavy black hair adorned with teal stones, and wore loose fitting silken clothing to match. The day was warm and moist, as were most days in Zior, so her feet, arms, belly, and shoulders were uncovered, revealing her smooth tan-colored skin.

“Hello, children, my name is Ninnia. Welcome to the garden of Palaxis.”

The children pressed in towards Ninnia, their eyes shining brightly with wonder.

“Now, who would like to take a tour of some of our plants here?” Ninnia asked, her eyes dancing just as brightly as the children's.

These class outings always brought out the inner child in Ninnia. It reminded her of when she was a girl and had taken the same tour. Almost immediately, she had fallen in love with the spirits of the plant world. They had drawn her in with their soft, yet vibrant energy. They captivated her with their abundant beauty and gentle power.

Ironically, these same plants also helped her connect with the adult version of herself. She felt the calling of feminine mother energy whenever she ushered the children into the garden. She was the protector of the vegetable kingdom. Her knowledge would be passed on to these bright, young souls. Thus, the garden of Palaxis would be preserved for untold future generations.

“Now follow me, children, as we step into the world of nature! Our first stop will be the plants that could best be called *Noveni*, meaning possessing of a long, slender stalk that curls around, grows quite profusely, and generally produces many leaves that branch off the stalk.”

Ninnia noticed that some of the children's eyes seemed to wander a bit when she went into the specifics of the plants, but she was delighted to see others whose faces lit up as they took notes and photographs with their slender pictogams. The pictogams were tiny cylinders that hovered lightly in the air and captured images up to a mile in width when an invisible button was lightly pressed. Every child of Zior had one.

“Now here we see the lovely *Florip julium*, known for its violet flowers, incredibly fragrant aroma, and its, shall we say, unique chemical properties.”

“Ooh, I want to smell one!” A little boy proclaimed loudly.

“Me too!” a girl with ribbons in her hair chimed in.

“Very well, one at a time, please. Line up everyone!” Ninnia smiled as the children queued up to inhale a whiff of the vibrantly purple flower.

Several wrinkled their noses and giggled after their turn at smelling. When they were done, a little girl with sparkly amethyst hair named Veretta asked about the plant's “unique chemical properties”.

Ninnia smiled. “Well, it's been said that the *Florip julium* has been known to cause one's energy to flare up in cascades of blue, far beyond the realms of normal blue, for lack of better terminology.”

“What do you mean, *blue*?” a little boy asked, wide-eyed.

“Welllll, why don't we all try a piece and see? If that's alright with your teacher?” Ninnia asked, looking toward Lexi.

*This man again! What can it mean, his appearing in my life so often lately?* Ninnia wondered.

Lexi was a striking young man by anyone's standards. Thin, handsome, blonde, with piercing blue eyes. Still, it wasn't as though Ninnia really considered him of serious romantic interest. She had only desired Jorral for as long as she could remember. Pursuing other roads, even in her mind, often only led to confusion.

Lexi nodded. "Of course the children may try the plant. One at a time, please, children."

So it was that each child took a small piece of the strangely attractive *Florip julium*. They stuffed the little leaves into their mouths, chewed greedily, and waited....and waited. Five whole minutes passed before a chubby boy with a mop of crimson hair and blue eyes asked, "How come it's not working, Miss Ninnia?"

"Patience, young...Fredlum," she gently admonished, reading the floating name card above his head. "Any minute now, and you will see. Let's all close our eyes and join hands while we wait. That should make the effect that much stronger."

So they did as they were bade. When each pair of tiny eyes had been closed, a stillness crept over the garden. For a blissful moment, all was still, as is the ocean before a wave comes finally rolling in to break on the shore. Then their toes began to tingle, and next their legs, then their tummies, until finally their entire bodies were buzzing ever so slightly with a gentle tickling sensation.

And then, *Whoom!* a flash of blue light washed over the children's inner vision. *Whoom!* again, as a rush of blue came and went, thrumming through their bodies until it exited their heads through the crown chakra, gateway to the celestial kingdom. The waves of blue kept coming, bringing with them a rather funny sensation.

"It feels like my head is waving back and forth!" Timblex, a young boy with eyes like stars and skin like a lake's surface cried.

"Like a sheet in the wind!" Manari, a pretty girl with pearl white eyes added.

The children could no longer contain their glee as the blue energy continued to rush through them. Ninnia too was caught up in the sensation, a feeling she rarely indulged in. Though now she was wondering why.

Lexi felt it too. He hadn't smiled often enough lately, he now realized. He'd been too absorbed in his studies, too absorbed in helping the world. This rush of energy felt so good though! How could you not let yourself smile? He felt an enormous amount of tension simply wash out of him. His body was a wave of blue light floating in a sea of energy. None of the past mattered. None of the future either. There was nothing left to hold on to! He felt free, at peace. The universe was nothing but a gentle ebb and flow.

*This is how life should be!* he thought blissfully, eyes pressed closed, hands held between two youngsters full of loving energy.

With that thought, the waves began to slow. They all felt their bodies' wavering motions slowing down. Soon only an occasional *Whoom!* of a blue wave passed through them, until finally, everyone let out a collective sigh of pure relaxation.

Fredlum broke the silence by saying what they were all thinking.

"That was *FUN!*"

Everyone laughed at once.

"As you can see, children, *Florip julium* is definitely an interesting species," Ninnia declared.

"Now, let's see what we have in our herbal section."

"Do you have anything else like *that?*" Manari asked.

"We just may Manari, we just may."

## Chapter 27

The Changeling Prince smiled and laughed to himself. To be in a state where one realizes their own eternal and magnificently beautiful nature was pure ecstasy.

Long ago, he had dared to look behind the preconceived notions he had within, and what he saw was an unending stream of love. Thus he had been reborn, with a conviction that life is to be lived in a pure, loving state.

He realized that everything is already perfectly as it should be. Yet, the more he focused upon the pure joy of life, the more he witnessed this truth all around him. When you realize you are eternal, there is no reason to hold on to anything any longer. The only thing that makes sense is to let go, and enjoy each moment of existence.

So, even with this seemingly grave quest for a solution to the impending trouble with the dream pools, he was calm. Nothing could mar his limitless consciousness. Nothing would ever be able to end his explorations through time, space, and the non-physical worlds besides.

Still, it would be wonderful to preserve the visionary sustenance of his people in this incarnation. Despite his grandiose views of the cosmos and his inherent nature, he was still a sentimental creature in many ways.

He still recalled his first visit to the pools. He had never seen water so pristine. The surface shimmered like a mirror that reflected yourself back to you in a way that enhanced all of your most attractive features. His father had told him that the pools ran far down into the bowels of the earth. That they poured themselves all the way down to the very core of the planet. Alex imagined himself slipping into the pools and floating down forever into the subterranean world.

Even just being near the pools, he felt overwhelmed by the sense that the mysteries of the universe were bubbling to the surface to be revealed to him.

"These are the sacred pools of Zior, son," his father had said. "Because they exist, we are able to tap into the limitless consciousness within. They aid us in our dreams, our meditative visions, our personal insights even."

"How do they do all that, father?" Alex asked, his eyes filled with wonder.

"Physically, the water is pumped throughout all of Zior," his father replied. "We drink it, bathe in it, wash our clothes with it. It is believed there is some sort of crystalline structure to this water that helps our minds function on a higher level than they otherwise would." His father paused, considering. "This water is also highly charged in ways I can't fully explain. It is said to have been culled from the stuff that stars and moons are made of. Long ago, the fabric of space was pulled by our ancestors into the liquid form you see here. That way, we can ingest the material that constitutes the universe physically. You see, we each possess all the knowledge and insight we could ever need. Still, it is useful in this physical form to sometimes provide a bridge to the world of the spirit."

"So that's what the water does?" Alex asked.

"Yes, I believe so," his father answered with a smile and a brief nodding of his head.

Now that bridge was crumbling. The pools, for some reason, were darkening. It wouldn't be long now before the effects were felt on Zior.

The Changeling Prince closed his eyes and focused on the solution. The waters of Zior returning to their full luster. Every being flush with the healing waters that sustained their dreams.

"What is the next step in the process of bringing this vision into reality?" he asked himself.

*Of course. Him again.*

Once more the Changeling Prince smiled to himself. The light that told him he had a request for an audience was blinking green. Next to the light was an image of Jorral's face, shining black eyes that



told of a soul as old as time, of emotions that ran as deep as the deepest sea.

## Chapter 28

“What am I trying to do here?” she asked herself as she stared into the mirror. She ran a smooth, white hand through her fine black hair. It was a vain attempt to ease some of the tension she felt inside of her.

What if he doesn't feel the same? It's not like she'd have anywhere to go to get away. They were on this ship together for who knew how long. Not to mention the fact that their actual roles onboard involved a great deal of interaction.

*Tysha, sweetheart, why are you trying so hard to protect yourself?*

The voice in her head was not her own, she knew. She, like most of Zior had a great deal of first hand experience receiving communications from guides, a higher power, universal intelligence, or whatever one chose to name it.

She felt some of her distress fade then. She inhaled deeply through her tiny nostrils and closed her eyes.

*You're right, there's no reason to worry. Everything will be alright in the end, no matter what happens. And I'm a pretty awesome girl. Why wouldn't he like me? You know, it could even be magical, who knows?*

She let her black eyelashes flutter open.

“Tysha, you're perfect and beautiful as you are,” she said to herself for perhaps the millionth time. It was a ritual she had begun performing in her teens. It had really come in handy then, as she was a bit gangly and awkward until she learned to accept herself as she was. Until the idea gained more and more of a hold on her psyche, until her subconscious recognized the truth of her beauty more readily.

Ten minutes later, she was out the door, headed for the Engineering room.

When she got there, she found the whirlwind fast at work. He was a blur of motion even when he worked on something casual, like emptying the garbage into a matter recycler. But now it seemed as though a trillion microscopic jets had coalesced into a tornado of activity.

*Must be something important.*

“Um, excuse me...,” she began.

A friendly face popped out of the blur, while the rest of the whirlwind body continued to work at a frenetic pace.

“Hello, Tysha lady, how ya doin'?” he yelled with glee.

“Er, I'm good, thanks.”

The whirlwind had always made Tysha feel a mixture of bubbly joy and dizziness. He was like a cute puppy, but with the energy of an imploding star. Endearing, but exhausting.

“Anything I can help you with?” he asked politely.

*May as well do this.*

“Is Rax around?” Tysha let her gaze flicker up for only a moment before she let her eyes rest once again on the floor. Her emotions were pulling her down into a sea of nervous butterflies. But the important thing was that she was here, putting her heart on the line.

The Blue guy put his fingers to his lips and whistled, loudly. “HEY BOSS MAN! LADY TYSHA'S HERE TO SEE YA!”

Tysha began to blush when he started hollering. The whirlwind beamed at her.

“Gee, thanks, friend.” Tysha felt as if she might faint.

“I'm comin'. No need to shout,” a gravelly voice called from the adjacent room.

And then, there he was. Rax, Master Engineer of the *Light Bearer*. He looked like he hadn't shaved in days, as he had tiny blonde and brown stubble poking out of a chiseled jawline and the

faintest trace of puffy cheeks. His eyes were soft blue-grey orbs, two seas of cloudy storms. There were mysteries untold in those eyes, Tysha thought. His hair was a sort of spiky bush, reminiscent of one of the Findooovil urchins. His body was lean and muscular, except for a tiny bit of a belly. A physique garnered from years of working out and relaxing and indulging with the best of them. Rax was a man known for his discipline, work ethic, and occasionally wild nature. He would get any job done, but when it was time to punch out, he didn't skimp on the good things in life.

A tiny, yet warm smile began to creep up his face when he noticed it was Tysha who had come to pay him a visit.

“Well, hello, Tysha. What can I do for you today?”

“Hi Rax,” Tysha smiled nervously. “Um, would it be alright if we talked in private for a bit?”

Rax's smile began to waver a little, but the pupils of his eyes seemed to sparkle a little with excitement as they danced in their blue-grey seas.

“Sure, if that's what works for you. Though I guess you know old blue and Doc here will probably end up knowing what we talk about, more or less.” Rax looked at her seriously, if a bit bashfully.

“I know, I just think it'd help me with what I want to talk about.”

“OK. Suit yourself,” Rax replied with a shrug.

Tysha knew all about how little escaped the notice of Rax's partners. The whole ship knew. They were, after all, simply aspects of his own personality.

Although the man she had seemed to have fallen for was the confident, young soul with dashing features and strong hands, Tysha knew he also had some, perhaps, less appealing aspects as well.

In his youth, Rax had been simply a normal young boy on Zior. He seemed much like other children at first, but soon it would be rather apparent that this was not the case.

The first signs of his distinctly unique features were the random outbursts of seemingly unprovoked chatter. Rax would be sitting peacefully at dinner with his family, when all of a sudden, he'd start talking incredibly fast about anything from birds to celestial eddies. Or at other times, he'd begin to sound incredibly dour for no reason at all.

Then came the facial changes. As if the chattering wasn't strange enough, soon Rax began to display an array of contrasting facial features. The expressions would run the gamut, from perky as all getout to totally dismal, or even completely stoic. Then, out of nowhere, he'd return to what his friends and family thought of as his 'normal' self.

Rax himself had no recollection of these events, it seemed. This mild amnesia finally prompted Rax's parents to bring him to a psychic to see what was going on inside their little boy.

“I hear many voices within this child,” the psychic said with a frown. “I've never quite seen anything like it. These aren't entities outside of Rax that have attached themselves, and this doesn't appear to be a case of psychological trauma in this or a previous lifetime either. It's as if...” The psychic hesitated.

“Yes, what is it?” Rax's mother Etherma asked with a worried look in her eyes. The hunger to know what was going on with her boy was as plain as day.

“It seems to me as if there are actually several distinct personalities incarnated within your son.” The psychic looked at Rax's parents with a mixture of compassion and concern through dark coffee colored eyes behind thin, pale blue glasses.

Rax's parents were shocked. They'd never heard of such a thing.

“So what can we do to help him?” Rax's father Tyned wore glasses as well, though they had red lenses, and he wore his black hair combed back in a wave. He was the picture of hygiene and orderliness, even more than the psychic, who wore her hair in a frizzy sort of perm.

“I've never assisted in anything like this, but I might know of someone who could help.”

Tolevi was a tall man with long blonde hair that hung down past his shoulders. His face was clean shaven, and he wore round-rimmed spectacles much like Tyned's. He worked as an experimental

geneticist and physicist in the capital of Zior.

“Well, can you help our son?” Etherma asked pleadingly.

Tolevi gave a measured look at Rax's parents.

“I'll be frank, I have never tried anything like this before. I'm not certain what the results could be. Still, I believe I can help your son, yes.”

In the end, it was decided that Rax's personalities could be distilled into three complete beings. One to represent his calculating, scientific, dour side. Another to take on the most lighthearted, youthful, and energetic aspects. Lastly, a third personality would be carved from the mix to be all that Rax's parents saw as the child they had come to love.

Rax's parents pressed their hands together for comfort as their son was placed in a chamber constructed of gemstones, metal, and wire.

Tolevi pressed a few buttons, intoned a few sacred words, and the machine began to emit sounds of a most curious nature. Lights switched on and off all around the room, moving along with the buzzing, tingling, and crackling sound waves that permeated the air.

Soon, Rax began to jerk to and fro, and the various facial contortions that had plagued him of late came to the surface in a rush of emotion. He shouted, cried, laughed, complained, danced, and even sang in Ziorian and in tones of gibberish in roughly equal measure.

When the machine finally stopped, Tyned and Etherma rushed to see what had become of their son.

“Ughhhh, why am I so tired?” Rax complained.

“Son, you're alright!” Tyned proclaimed happily, tears of joy running down his face.

“Course I am Dad, why wouldn't I be?” Rax seemed perplexed somewhat by his father's outburst. He scrunched his face up into a little ball, as if protecting himself from such a ridiculous inquiry.

“My Rax, it's so good to see you, honey,” Etherma said, wrapping him in her arms.

“Greetily Doob!” a voice shouted. And that was how the blue whirlwind came screeching into the world. Most people ended up calling him Whirlwind, or Blue Guy, but his official name had always been Meeks.

Then came the Doctor. Originally, he had called himself Nord, but pretty much everyone called him Doc these days.

If ever there were two totally different personalities, it would be Doc and Meeks. One was vivacious, where the other was somber. One methodical and complex, while the other was as animated as a fireworks display.

Still, as the years went by, all three had stuck together. They seemed to make a good team, with Rax as the unofficial leader, Blue Guy as the chief worker, and Doc as the diagnostic specialist. Right now, however, Tysha was only concerned with one member of the engineering team.

“So what's going on, little lady?” Rax asked with a sly grin.

Part of what was worrying Tysha was just this. Rax's easygoing way with women, and seemingly life in general. It was as if he was holding all the cards, with nothing to lose. It seemed like he couldn't be hurt by lost love, or anything of the sort. She had everything to lose, while he would continue to stroll through life with an easy smile, whatever the outcome of this conversation. Or so it would seem to Tysha.

“Rax...I- I'm not sure where to begin.” She glanced down a bit at the floor, and then dug deep and found the courage to look Rax in the eyes.

“I really like you Rax, and not just as a coworker.” Tysha let a significant glance pass from her to Rax.

Now that it was out there in the open, she felt exhilarated, free. The ball was in his court now.

“I assume you don't just mean as a friend either?” he asked, suddenly serious.

Her slow shake of the head confirmed that indeed, she had more than friendship in mind.

“Well, well...really?” he replied softly. His face had taken on a more serious expression, as if he were giving the matter some importance.

She nodded, her eyes revealing just a fraction of how vulnerable she really felt.

“Tysha, that's great! I really like you too,” Rax burst in reply, taking a step towards her.

“You do?” she said, suddenly smiling.

“Of course! You're smart, beautiful, in control of your life, and not a half bad pilot either.”

“Oh Rax, I'm so glad,” she replied as she rushed forward to embrace him in a fierce hug.

Then they kissed. It felt as if all the loneliness, fear, confusion, and tension leading up to this moment simply vanished in a wash of ecstatic passion.

*He liked her too! Oh, and how wonderful it felt to be kissed in such a way.*

Rax too was lost in a swarm of emotions. How long had she felt this way? God it felt good to give in to this feeling. He'd had a fair amount of women in his past, to be sure. But lately it all just seemed to ring hollow somehow. The meaningless dance of flesh. Trying to fill the void he felt inside himself.

Lately, he'd just kept his emotions bottled up inside himself. In fact, he hadn't even been aware of just how reserved he'd been until this moment. This felt so *real*. It felt alive, like his body, mind, and soul were on fire. He was allowing himself to run free with the feeling, wherever it might lead.

When they broke apart, they locked orbit in each others' eyes.

“Hello, Tysha,” he said, gently brushing away a lock of her silky black hair.

“Hi, Rax,” she returned, her eyes misting up.

“You're beautiful when you cry, you know that?”

Then she melted into his arms.

*Everything is going to be alright.*

## Chapter 29

Jorral paused on the threshold to the prince's audience chamber. So many feelings were running through him. He desperately wished he were back home on Zior with Ninnia. She had been his light and love for years now. Although he was a gifted seer, singer, and wordsmith who loved traveling through the vast terrain of the psyche and spirit, Jorral also deeply appreciated security, stability, and steadfastness. Flying through the universe on a quest of unknown destiny was hardly any of those things.

He missed her touch, her gentle smile. All the magical nuances he had discovered within her. When they first met, he felt an instant attraction, but he somehow knew that there were untold layers to be discovered within their relationship. He had always intuitively felt that he would need a partner with multifaceted aspects to their personality. Someone to keep him interested. Someone to keep his spirit hungry for more. Jorral also needed someone who would be there for him should there be any times of confusion. Someone to shed tears with, someone to grow old with. Someone to live with, and eventually, die with.

Someone to share their very essence with him, and he in turn with them. A union on the most profoundly open and sublime of levels. With Ninnia, he had found that, and perhaps more. She enthralled him, took him into the depths of ecstasy, and through the mundane wash of everyday life. Let him become the provider, and the refugee seeking shelter from the rain. She let him wear every mask there was to wear, loving him for it all the while. She was his thousand-eyed fire dancer, his princess of the night, and his rock. Yet she was now millions of miles away across the vast leagues of space.

Yes, the mind meditations and viewings helped, but it wasn't truly the same. Part of him ached to be near her again. To roll in the sand of his beloved home world and lose himself in her arms. Still, perhaps part of his soul was grateful for the distance. It was one more dance they could play together. To live out the separation of space and once again reunite in the flame of love.

Ninnia's love wasn't the only thing Jorral had on his mind, however. The pools of Zior grew darker as the days passed. Very few had reported anything more serious than a nightmare or two, but in these slow rumblings, Jorral saw the possible beginnings of fully fledged mental trauma waiting in the wings. For one thing, Zior hadn't had anyone have what could truly be called a nightmare since the Great Crossing. Once they had gained a foothold on their conscious minds, the Ziorians had begun to see more peace in their dreams.

Then came the dream weavers, a group of the newly enlightened who saw the benefit of carrying the great cleansing work into the realms of the dreamworld.

Via dream transmissions and sleeping mediations, the dream weavers were able to instill a greater sense of bliss, compassion, and peace into the sleeping states of other Ziorians. Chaos was replaced by placid scenes that soothed the mind. Confusion and dreams of being hunted by abysmally vile creatures were chased away by dreams of flying, or playing in the jungle.

Eventually, nighttime was ruled by an epoch of relaxation and happiness. Zior awoke each day more at peace and alive than ever before.

The benefits of this dream cleansing were obvious and numerous. An incredible amount of psychic baggage was dislodged in this way. These days, everyone started their waking period with their eyes wide open to the beauty of the world around them, as they had just awoken from the beauty of their inner being.

Now, however, nightmares were returning. What would the consequences be? Nobody knew for certain, but Jorral suspected the unfortunate results would be visible in the conscious world soon. Still,

worrying wouldn't do anything but add to the problems. What Jorral needed was to try and find an answer to the dilemma, and soon. Maybe then he could put those haunting purple eyes out of his mind and return safely to his beloved.

Jorral pressed the admittance button and was quickly beckoned inside.

The Changeling Prince sat on his simple, yet elegant throne. The finely crafted arms of the chair suited the thin frame of his body. His hair hung long and black, much like Jorral's. His eyes were two deep ebony pools that reminded one of the abyssal depths of space.

His pale face betrayed nary a hint of emotion at the moment. This didn't surprise Jorral, however. It was rare for the prince to exhibit any great emotion outside of his appearances during visions. His was the world of the infinite, of time and space stretched into nothing. He seemed to walk through skies no one else could see. Paradoxically, he seemed to stare right into you, as if he could take in every atom of your being all at once and read your every vibration. What was more, behind the cold appearance one often had the impression that the prince was always laughing quietly to himself on the inside.

The prince stood and embraced Jorral. His body seemed surprisingly strong for how light it was. Jorral felt as if a hollow frame of the strongest, lightest material ever known were being pressed against him. Like the bones of space...

"It is good to see you, Jorral," the prince began.

"And you as well, Alex," Jorral returned.

Jorral was not sure what he had expected, but he was just the tiniest bit surprised to find himself feeling not entirely lost in awe in the man's presence.

"Please, sit." The prince motioned for Jorral to sit in a chair that was nearly identical to his own. Alex may have been a unique shapeshifting shaker of worlds, but he did his best to treat you like the equal he believed you were.

"I'd like you to see something," the prince said, pointing a gracefully carved finger towards a screen to his right. There was an image of a man and a child walking in one of Zior's parks.

"Please don't be alarmed by what I am about to show you, Jorral," the Changeling Prince said as the image began to move.

A film of the man and the boy walking began to play. The day was beautiful, the scene placid. It was familiar to Jorral, as it would have been to anyone of Zior.

*Why would I be alarmed?*

Suddenly, the boy began to pull at the pant leg of his father.

"Look, Dad! A Plastar bug!" the child beamed as he looked at a scarlet beetle that flew through the air.

The father, however, seemed incredibly annoyed, agitated somehow. He rubbed his temples in slow methodic circles as the little boy continued to implore his father to view the crimson critter.

All of a sudden, the man exploded.

"Why are you bothering me with this *now* Rykell? Can't you see my head is hurting? Who cares about a stupid *bug* anyway?!"

The boy stopped and stared at his father. Obviously he was deeply hurt by the man's words, because he began to cry.

"Rykell, why are you-," the man began angrily, then stopped when he saw that his actions had begun to cause others to stare in his direction. "Rykell," he said more softly, "I- I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I think it's just these dreams I've been having lately. I'm not myself."

With that, the man sat down on the grass and cradled his head in his hands.

"It's OK Dada, I forgive you," Rykell consoled his father.

The prince paused the film.

"This is one of the men who reported having a nightmare recently," Alex said with a whisper of concern in his voice.

*It's as I suspected then,* Jorral thought.

“And I suppose this is related to the pools?” Jorral asked, though he knew the answer.

“Of course. All of Zior drinks from those waters. Both physically, and metaphysically, in their dreams,” the prince replied.

“Yes. The physical affects the subconscious and dream states, which in turn affects the conscious state and vice versa. I had feared this would happen.”

“As had I. It is my most sincere wish that we find a solution to this problem before things get worse.”

It was unheard of for an elder to shout at a child in the way the man had.

Zior had all but eliminated stress from its existence. People eventually grew old and died, but this occurred painlessly and gracefully. No one ever had reason to lash out in anger, especially towards a child immersed in innocent curiosity.

“It is a far cry from the strife and wars of the past, but still, I share your concern,” Jorral acknowledged gravely. “I very much dislike the idea of any return to our previous ways.”

The prince leaned forward in his seat, black eyes glowing with light. “Do you have any suggestions as to how to proceed, Jorral? After all, you are perhaps the main reason why we are here.” The Changeling Prince stared into Jorral's eyes as he spoke.

“Me? But I don't understand,” Jorral protested.

“Look within yourself, Jorral. Don't you remember? This is your destiny.”

Jorral closed his eyes. He tried to think back, to how he had reached this point in his life. What had brought him on this voyage? He had thought it was his gifts as a singer, a weaver of tales and creative forces for which he had been chosen.

Then he thought back to when he originally discovered his gifts. He had been sitting near some stones in a desert. His parents were nearby, but he was basically alone. He was only six years old. The world was full of wonder, and he had the sudden thought to try and move the stones around him into a ring. He knew he could somehow do this using only the power of his voice and his mind.

Without thinking about it, he began to sing softly to the stones, feeling their essence. Soon, they responded to his melodious vibrations, floating through the air towards him. The words and notes came and wove themselves together through the rocks and the air, until finally, the stones formed a perfect circle around him.

His father simply stared at him in wonder. He had come to tell Jorral that dinner was ready when the stones had been in mid-flight.

Jorral was one of the first truly naturally gifted singers in Zior's known history. Others had been known before him, but they had typically received years of training. Perhaps it was a sign of the times, but Jorral's abilities seemed to come without any formal training. Soon there would be other prodigy children in other fields; more and more as time went on.

One day, while Jorral was deep in meditation, he happened upon a vision. It was a vision of the stars. The vast cosmos opened up for Jorral. The planets and glowing nebulae seemed to share their secrets with him. He felt himself collapsing, expanding, drifting. Melting into the very essence of space.

Somehow he was able to penetrate into the deepest core of the fabric of reality. Time and space stretched like a web in all directions. He couldn't explain what he was receiving in words, but somehow he could *feel* the origins of existence, the universal core of all worlds.

As he delved further and further into the depths of creation, the mysteries of reality unfolded for him. Soon, he came to a place where stillness seemed to hover in the midst of chaos. Reality was being birthed from virtually nothing. Incomprehensible to the rational mind, but in that state Jorral felt that he understood.

Once this understanding came, Jorral was sucked back into his body as it was in its fetal state: miniscule arms and legs teeming with life, newly risen consciousness exploding in wonder.



He beheld then that imprinted in his eyes and mind were star formations. Constellations within, that informed him of his celestial origins. What was more, they told of distant galaxies he would yet revisit in physical form.

The last thing he saw in this trance state was the tiny hand of an infant, reaching for a purple star cluster in the distant black of space.

When Jorral awoke from this vision, he felt compelled by the knowledge of the star. He must make the voyage to this star cluster, that much seemed clear.

So it was that he brought his vision before the Council of Twelve. Twelve seers capable of penetrating deep into the purpose and plans of any soul. Beings capable of marshaling great power within Zior. When they saw the truth written within the spirit and called for action, all of Zior rallied to the cry.

Jorral found himself in the center of a small chamber made of stone. The walls were slick with moisture and well rounded from years of erosion. Here dripped the waters that fed all life on Zior. This chamber was deep underground, miles below the surface. Jorral had arrived via an elevator carved into the earth and rock that plummeted into the surface of his home world.

Translucent shining crystals lit the chamber with soft, glowing light. The Twelve were encircled around Jorral, murmuring their incantations and prayers. Jorral was bade to stay silent and try to relax as the twelve seers did their work.

The ritual took perhaps an hour to complete. When it was done, Jorral was told his request had been heard and honored within the true depths of his being. He would be granted every resource necessary to make his journey.

However, it was also revealed to the seers that the most suitable time for this journey would not arrive for years hence. So, Jorral was made to forget about this vision in his waking mind. Remembering only in the depths of his soul, in the star patterns enmeshed in his being, Jorral forged ahead in his life.

Eventually, he grew into the powerful and wise singer he was now. He had joined with the love of his life, Ninnia, as together they had fostered many dreams both terrestrial and cosmic.

Then had come the fateful day when the pools of Zior had grown dark, and the Changeling Prince had summoned him on an interstellar quest of unknown destination. He had said goodbye to his lifemate, boarded the monolithic craft of the *Light Bearer*, and set sail for the stars.

“So you see, Jorral, this was all set in motion long ago, from before you were even born to the shores of Zior.”

Jorral stared into the prince's eyes, and suddenly knew in his bones that this was true. It was as if he were waking from a dream, or as if he had been sailing through a vast ocean of fog. Now, that fog was lifting, and he could see the shore that he had yearned for all along, though he knew it not in his waking mind. Jorral was going back to his true birth place. Jorral was going home.

## Chapter 30

*What worlds lie behind those grey, watery eyes?* Tysha wondered to herself as she stared at Rax. They lay together in a warm embrace, sweat sticky and cooling ever faster as it clung to their bodies. The love making had been fantastic, not necessarily in an explosively pleasurable sense physically, but in the realization that she was now entwined with someone she had been secretly yearning for for quite some time.

The waiting was over. Now the real journey would begin. She had no idea how long their time together would last, or where it would take them, but just the simple release of the old storyline of loneliness and desire had a profound cleansing effect on Tysha's perception. It seemed as if she had a new sense of clarity, or at least what amounted to such from her vantage point. Their coupling had been so emotional, so intensely passionate in all its subtle beauty. Neither one of them truly knew the intricacies of the other yet, but the feeling had overwhelmingly been one of love. Little things seemed to feel slightly awkward for a time as they writhed together. However, these short bursts of confusion were met with such compassion, even laughter, from both sides, that there was a sense of deep security and trust underlying everything.

Tysha had always wanted to feel safe in a lover's arms. She had experienced it before, but not for many years. She'd been searching for the sensation in the arms of various lovers for years but nothing had come close to this experience. Tysha was deeply grateful for her meeting with the psychic.

*Don't forget your own role in this, dear one.* A voice within her said.

*You're right.* Tysha thought back. It had taken a lot of courage to open herself up to Rax. Now all the pain of worrying and delaying seemed like a lost and faded dream. A dream that had been broken by sweat and the loving embrace of truth's vision.

Rax leaned over to give her a kiss. His stubbled face gently scoured her cheeks as his lips melted into hers. Such a sweet feeling, to be kissed that way.

"Mmm, Rax I think I love you." Tysha purred softly.

Rax was silent for a moment, then he gazed seriously into her eyes before replying "I love you too, Tysha."

She smiled as tears slowly flowed down her eyes. She had never heard him speak so sweetly. It was deliciously intoxicating to hear him reveal such a tender part of himself to her.

"Rax, I'm so happy right now. I just feel so...so *good*."

Rax smiled. "I think I now what you mean."

Their hands found new areas to explore on each others bodies then. Every cell of every fingertip danced with aliveness as they brushed against skin filled to the brim with joy.

It had taken quite a while, but they had found each other. In the blackness of space they had come together. Where would they go from here? Would waking life present any unforeseen challenges?

Part of Rax deeply wanted to discuss these matters with Tysha. He felt he owed it to her to talk about where this might lead. But he was caught in the sense of wanting, almost needing to prolong this moment. He too had yearned for it for so long. Still, no sense in trying to hold on to things.

"Tysha, is there anything you think we should talk about?" Rax began softly.

"Like what? Butterflies and spaceships?" Tysha giggled.

"I was thinking something a little more practical. I mean about us."

Tysha pouted slightly. She too had wanted the peace of this moment to last. But perhaps there was nothing to fear.

"Honestly, Rax, I'm just happy to be here with you now. I feel like this is exactly where I want to be, and the rest will sort itself out."

Rax smiled, chiseled features creasing to give way to the innocent face of a young boy.

“I like the way you think, lady.”

So for now, there was nothing more to say. Stillness and silence took over the room as the newly joined lovers fell asleep in each others arms.

## Chapter 31

Ninnia stared into the violet rose, her mind caught between wonder and a daydream. The soft folds of the flower wove themselves together in a spiral pattern, even as the petals themselves flared outward to greet the world.

A beautiful synthesis of unity and opposition. The many paths united in one swirling, beautiful core. A thorny stem supporting and protecting such delicate beauty. A wonderful and odd coupling.

It made Ninnia think of many things, Jorral of course among them. His proclivity for domestic pursuits, his wandering mind, and his puissant spirit. A simple man wrapped in the mists of the ethereal and esoteric.

She also thought of their union. All the ways in which they were united, but also the ways in which they differed. Both shared a love of light and of nature. Lovers of home and hearth, both shared a deep passion for preserving peace and love in the world. Both star-crossed lovers who were carried away by the waters of romance, intoxicated by the fantastic voyage of love.

Yet, Jorral was certainly the more restless of mind of the two. It seemed as if he was often lost in thought. Ninnia was generally a bit more focused on the here and now, though she too shared a fondness for the depths of the spiritual world. How could she not and be joined to someone so involved in the shifting worlds of the soul?

It was simply that she was more of a slow paddler through the waters of spirit, whereas Jorral simply flew through the ideas in his mind. Perhaps such was the life of a singer. They shared so very much, but it was only natural that they differed in some respects.

Oh, how she would like to see him now. To feel his smooth, shaven face and run her hands through his long, fine, black hair. To have him take her in his arms and make love to her. To feel the rush of his being coursing through her, to embrace his flesh, spirit, and mind as they came together in intensely loving union.

There were many joys and wonders in life, but none quite like the explosively ecstatic and serenely safe cocoon created when she and Jorral made love.

That was about all she could take. Today she would contact Jorral. It had been a few days, nothing she couldn't withstand. But she knew when to trust her feelings.

With thoughts of gazing into her lovers deep, jet eyes, she went to the viewer.

She pressed a few buttons, and the crystal screen came alive. Ninnia pressed her palm to a pad also constructed of crystal to her right, and thought of the place she wished to contact: the *Light Bearer*. As her right hand was her giving hand, she used it to initiate contact. She would need to switch to her left hand, her receiving hand, in order to receive messages. Her thoughts were transmitted via the crystal into all direction of time and space. The frequencies of her thoughts carried the signal towards a matching vibration, in this case that of the *Light Bearer*. The transmission demanded a certain degree of concentration, but this wasn't an issue for Ninnia, a practiced meditator with the patience of a gardener.

Within seconds, the screen returned an image of the bridge of the *Light Bearer*. A young woman with black hair down to her chin appeared on the screen.

"Greetings, my name is Tysha. Thank you for contacting the *Light Bearer*."

"Greetings, Tysha, my name is Ninnia. If it is possible, I would very much like to speak with my lifemate, Jorral."

"I'll see if I can put you through," Tysha replied.

Ninnia smiled her thanks, then the screen was filled with nothing but pure white light. Ninnia changed hands and waited for a return signal. A moment later, a familiar face stared back at her from the screen.

If there was such a thing as a vision of perfect love, this was it for Ninnia. Looking at Jorral was like gazing into a still pool, silvery water reflecting pure sunlight. Jorral smiled at his beloved. A silver haze of light danced around his head, signifying the angelic essence of his being.

Ninnia had been able to see into parts of Jorral's pure soul with ever greater frequency as they became more and more entwined in the fibers of their love.

Their hearts were clearly visible in all their light-filled glory as they looked upon one another. The dance of translucent radiance compelled Ninnia and Jorral to feel intense, yet sublimely subtle, waves of love. Pure heart vibrations palpitated out from their green chest chakras, spiraling out like minushri octopus tentacles, playfully wriggling towards one another.

Such peace and wonder. Such a deep sense of commitment, combined with total freedom. The physical space between them stretched for aeons, but spiritually, the gap was non-existent.

They had ascended as one cosmic ray of light, burning higher and faster as they unified their life paths. Enthralled, comforted, enraptured, seen, understood, aware, and, above all, loved. It was as it should be, or so it seemed.

"Hello, Jorral," Ninnia began, eyes filled with soft warmth.

"Hello, dearest," Jorral returned.

To Jorral, Ninnia's aura appeared as a resplendent halo of blue and purple stripes. She was a beacon of peace and wisdom, and a much welcome sight.

"How are you, Jorral?" Ninnia asked, her face becoming a trifle serious.

"It is hard to explain my dear. There is so much that has been revealed to me since we last spoke," Jorral replied slowly. "Perhaps it is best if we were to merge in meditation. Then I could show you what I have seen."

"That is a wonderful idea, love," Ninnia replied, smiling.

Jorral and Ninnia then closed their eyes and joined their hands together over their laps. Inhaling slowly, they began to allow their minds to relax. Thinking patterns became less rigid as trains of thought passed through their minds. Focusing on their breathe at first, then allowing their attention to drop to their heart center. Inside the roiling torrent of blood and celestial energy, they found a quiet place. Here, only love echoed in the still chamber of the heart.

Pulling gently at their heartstrings, they allowed a thin web of tendrils to unravel. Out from the newly created aperture emerged a column of light. This light they consciously sent out towards one another through time and space.

Here they were not physical entities. Only their etheric bodies were transmitted across, lacking any boundaries to tie them to the material plane.

Faster and faster they raced through the void, hearts churning, until, at last, they united in a flash of exploding light.

Within an instant, Ninnia knew all Jorral had experienced aboard the *Light Bearer*. The visions of Tysha, the star patterns embedded in his soul since birth, his destiny. She knew how he ached for the stars and why he had to be where he was. This knowledge came as sweet succor for her soul, easing her surface mind's fragile worrying.

In turn, Jorral came to know her work in the garden, her waking dreams of Lexi. The mysterious feelings this young man instilled within her. These were feelings as yet unresolved, but he knew all would be well in time. Shadows weaving in the night often came to naught but scattered drams in the light of day.

Their stories exchanged, the lovers surrendered their thoughts. Now they engaged in allowing the gentle ebb and flow of their souls to swirl through one another in the wake of time.

There was nothing, anywhere, in the physical dimension that either had experienced that could compare to the feeling of bliss in that space. That was the beauty of union on the spiritual plane, it allowed one to shed their personality and experience unconditional love in all its glory.

Stillness gathered in pools of empty space. Breathe hung like a fragmented ghost, reality

escaping its prismatic shell and spilling at long last into the world of spirit.

Ninnia awoke hours later in darkness. She was once more alone in her room on Zior. She and Jorral had said their farewells within the expanse of loving space, deep within the fabric of reality that permeated all existence. Her mind was more at ease as her heart raced with the love that swelled within, filling it to bursting.

What lay behind them was now known, and what lie before, only the dawn could tell.

## *Chapter 32*

Lexi was once again gazing into the mirrorous surface of the water. Somehow, fretting over the possible fates of Zior seemed to give him a sense of purpose. Or at least he told himself that. Perhaps he ought to look away, to embrace the daylight and play with the children. Perhaps he ought to give up his quest for perfection and let the towering archetypes of his race fall or stand like silent monoliths as they wished.

His master, Darael, had urged him to abandon this quest, but news of the nightmares had spurred him onward. In some strange sense, he was glad. Perhaps his soul needed a puzzle to solve, a world to save. Perhaps he needed to become the hero he felt he could be. Perhaps.

Inside the water, he saw many things. Flowers bursting into colorful arrays, fire screaming across a broken land, shades of a broken sun twisting in the light of a newly formed nebula.

Worlds being born, altered, eroded by the waters of time. Tinkering with giant gears, falling ladders, and spheres of intricate bioluminescence.

If only he could understand the patterns, see where it all linked together, he could change Zior's fate and perfect the course of its history. How could he rest with the knowledge that he did not try his best to see the light of his beloved home world shine forever at its brightest apex, a beacon for all the universe, far and wide?

Some other part of him begged him to relax, to ease up on the throttle. For now, he only peered into the shifting sands of time, marveling at the intricacies of nature's creation.

## Chapter 33

Space hung outside the window like a velvet curtain. A thin, yet omnipresent veil between this world and whatever lay beyond. Rax was tired. The stars were innumerable, stretching on and on forever. The thought caused strange reactions within him. Part of him felt supercharged by the notion of infinity. Another, smaller, older part felt the crush of never ending events, the compression of overactivity and the incomprehensible nature of things. That voice perhaps belonged to the child still within him. The boy that so long ago woke screaming with energy into the panoply of color and motion that was his home world.

Before the Great Crossing, the world was different. Zior was governed more by arbitrary rules than by guidelines seen as generally beneficial to all. Rax was a dynamo built to break down the walls of unnecessary rigidity. He could not function in a world so filled with delight, yet so filled with restriction.

Raised to act a certain way, but possessing the aching desire to rise like a butterfly into the free air above. So it was that Rax ended up fracturing, all his energy spent in the bursting of a frail shell.

Now his supercharged essence lay mostly in the Blue Guy, Speedy. In a way, it was a blessing. Rax definitely felt calmer these days, and he didn't feel the burning need for movement that he had as a child. He still felt the energetic presence of Blue Guy's essence inside him, always. It was like a phantom limb of sorts, a lost energy signature that permeated his essence on a very subtle level.

Rax had been so very open as a child. He had no filter with which to keep the hounds of the collective psyche at bay. The domineering and controlling way of life that ruled a sizable portion of his society had been swallowed up with complete innocence by his subconscious.

Deep within the folds of his mind lay those rules, those calculating and magnificently structured prisons, so deftly reasoned and justified with the coldest of logic.

Still, everything had its purpose, and those ways helped him function for a time. Within a certain structure, those methods were so incredibly useful. No way could he maintain them alone, however. Between his childlike enthusiasm and steady structure, something had to give.

Thus, the Doctor was born, and one boy became three. Now ol' Doc was his trusted right hand man. So very reliable, despite his grumbling. Maybe Rax ought to find a way to try and cheer him up, but how? The man always did as he was asked, but he seemed to detest his life at times. Maybe he was still carrying some of Rax's old baggage related to rules and authority. The Doctor did seem to find *some* enjoyment in his work, however. At least, Rax could have sworn he had been able to detect a glimmer of joy within the Doc's eyes when he was turning a screw here, installing a console there. Maybe that was his angle: quiet solace and freedom through the joy of work and service.

In any case, he would have to do a little more investigation into just what made Doc tick. If there was any sadness within ol' Doc, Rax knew he still carried it within himself as well.

Who was Rax then, anyway? No longer a sewn together chaotic circus of dreams and ropes. No longer a youthful spitfire struggling to burst free of the chrysalis and fulfill his destiny. Now a man, with his own personal strength, desires, and attitude.

He was generally seen as calm and responsible by his friends. Easygoing and friendly, but with a certain gruffness. None too easy with sharing feeling with strangers, but always willing to listen. His heart beat as a rushing river. Mightily powerful and possessing of great depth deceptively hidden by a relatively placid surface. His was the type to look at the world in deep contemplation, letting time ebb and flow. His mind was at times quite sharp, at others a nebulous sea of dreams and visions.

His sleep was often filled with dreams of strange lands and grey dawns. Faraway towers, serpents devouring his being whole, or else dark birds staring into his soul.



As of late, however, a wild enchantress had stolen his heart's attention. She had woven herself into his dreams and liquefied the penetrating gaze of his intellect, transforming steel insight to roiling magma with the lightest touch.

Her feral nature had become more and more apparent in their love making, and her more primal side had found a home in his dreams as well. She tore through his soul like a wild beast, leaving gushing wounds of ecstasy flowing through his being.

Tysha was made of so much more than this wild passion, however. Her sweetness and shy fragility gave Rax the feeling of cradling a glass bird at times. Her heart was as open as his had been as a child, and now she was helping the river of love within him to flow once more.

The thaw was sweet, the tidal wave of love that obliterated his mind and took hold of his soul oh so much more than welcome. Together, the waters of their love were pouring together like two magnificent oceans, submerging each other in the purifying waters of love.

Rax looked out the window once more. He was still tired, but now not so weary. The child within was smiling, images of butterflies flying once more amidst tall and stately trees. Outside, space continued to hide itself away in the distant corners of reality like some wandering ghost. Stars that once seemed overwhelming now seemed filled with exciting promise. Rax smiled and felt the world within turn to softly glowing embers. He was a man at peace, a man on the edge of a great chasm, a man alive with the fire of all creation, in love with the universe, and all that is.

## Chapter 34

The cities of green glass stretched high into the heavens. The sun funneled its energy through the panes of glass, into the crystal workshops contained within.

Martuk stared up at the buildings as if he were recalling some long lost dream, Strange that he would feel this way after having visited these buildings nearly every day for so long. Martuk was a crystal weaver. He used his focused attention and gentle awareness of subtle energy bodies to transform the pure energy essence of eternity into the more physical manifestation of crystal. Crystal charged with great power and the emotion of the chosen intention.

It was a delicate work that took years of practice to master. But that was part of the process, part of the joy of his life. Martuk cherished his years learning how to recognize the subtle energies that made up the fabric of the universe. The many hours spent gently pulling on etheric chords, weaving them together out of nothingness. It was such a lovely dance, a tender caressing of the heart strings of the universe.

Martuk began to ascend the stairs to the third floor, where he had his workshop. Other crystal workers, wearing long robes that hung down to their feet, passed by on the stairs, smiling at Martuk politely as they did so. Martuk nodded back, but for some reason he was feeling a bit unusual this day. Things that he had recognized as a part of his daily existence now seemed foreign to him somehow. It was as if a part of himself had begun to question whether he was meant to be there at all.

Onward up the stairs he went, propelled by the inertia of days gone by. Spiraling up the stairs, until he reached his workshop. When he opened the green glass door he came upon a scene of many others engaged in their work. Some played music on large stringed instruments, plucking out enchantingly beautiful music that filled the room. All of Zior had a deep love for music, recognizing it as a supremely healing tool.

Others were creating music of a fashion all their own by forging new crystals, healing others with their hands, or engaging in deep soul work with another. Within the mass consciousness of Zior, the practice of viewing one another as paid worker and client had long ago been transformed into the perspective of sacred giving and receiving. The shackles of competitive commerce had been released, as all of Zior shifted towards discovering their hearts' true purpose.

With the focused intention of love, Martuk sat on the floor of his workshop. He placed himself within the center of an intricately woven star within what appeared to be a hexagram with circles at the intersections. This shape was specially used for clearing work designed to open the chakras. It was especially important that one be clear in body and mind while crafting intention infused crystal, as it would take on whatever attributes its creator embodied at the time of its creation.

Martuk took a deep breathe and allowed his mind to relax. He called upon his angelic guides to aid him in clearing his light body for this sacred task. He began to visualize pure white light with the quality of the unconditional love of the divine pouring through his body.

He felt the waves rush over him, and he began to feel more at peace. It was a centered and calm state he had entered many times before. Yet suddenly his mind seemed clouded, ever so slightly. He began to detect the most minute of disturbances in the rush of energy within him.

Why was he feeling this way? His purpose was here, his heart fulfilled. Or was it? Now he wondered what it might be like to play the stringed Q'art and create beautiful music with his hands. Perhaps he should be outside at the beach, playfully strolling towards the sea. Or maybe he ought to gather his family together for a lovely picnic, surprise them all with his spontaneity.

Martuk shook himself. These things had there time and place! Now was the time for crystal weaving. He breathed deeply and tried again to focus on the realms of the infinite. Once more he called

upon his guides, once more cascading light poured through his body.

This time, he felt more at ease, more sure of himself. Once he reached a state of deep relaxation, he began to search for a thread from the universal web of energy.

He let his surface mind go, and felt his heart slip into the silent within. Soon he came in touch with the core of his being, and thus, the center that unites all of reality.

Then, slowly, every so gently, he began to tug at the thread, wheedling a little out at a time. Soon he was weaving the thread into a more unified whole. He was shaping the threads into a crystal. Now, what should his intention be?

Suddenly, it was as if a great eye opened within him. Alert, awakened to the terrible clarity of a faraway dreamland, the eye saw the possibilities. Then a thousand such eyes opened to the same fractured clarity. An infinite stream of voices called for an infinite array of choices.

From this vantage point, Martuk typically was able to cull the most appropriate and potent intention. However, his mind seemed somehow timid this day, somehow unsure. It seemed as if one choice might lead down a terribly undesirable road, forging ruin within the crystal.

The voices groaned louder in a cacophony of sound. They implored Martuk to choose! Choose now or be devoured by the waves of indecision and confusion. But the burden seemed so heavy. To choose but one voice from an infinite sea of possibilities? What could he do in such a situation?

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The Changeling Prince awoke in the midst of the night, shaken by dreams of turmoil. He heard the voice cry out from the still womb of the world he called home.

He projected his mind towards the wailing cry of despair on Zior. It was a sound he had not heard for some many years, yet it brought back very vivid memories. Memories of a time when those of Zior still waded through a world of delusion and doubt. When only every so often, an individual would come up for air from underneath a sea of falsehood and veiled identity. The glimpses of clarity and true understanding were far more rare in those days.

Now Zior was blessed with an abundance of prosperity and hope. Now the cry most often heard was one of joy. This was different. Although the prince realized that indeed all actions, all relationships are based in love, and that the words, thoughts, and deeds of all were formed of an elaborate sharing of the soul, he strongly desired to maintain the peace and open flowing of love his people had enjoyed in recent years.

The Changeling Prince circled the planet as he honed in on the voice. It shone like a beacon of terror in an otherwise peaceful sky.

Swooping down towards the voice, it became clear that the cry was one of confusion. Abrupt realization took hold of the prince. This man was trying to meld with the world of infinite creation from a state of egocentric fear! The two states were not likely to mesh well.

How could this be? Clearly this man was skilled enough to reach this realm on his own power. How then did he find himself there, yet unaware of how to proceed?

No matter, the Changeling Prince was not slighted in such a way. Gathering his energy, he began to shield the man from the clamor of the other voices. He let soft waves of loving energy pour out from his being into the man's mind, soothing any discomfort there.

Thus insulated with love, Martuk began to return to a more relaxed state of mind. His outer shell of fearful thoughts dissipated, leaving a somewhat frightened, but altogether much calmer inner core.

The fiery eye of second sight fell closed. His mind dropped deeper into his body, until it connected with his heart.

Martuk felt peace then. He would spend some time in that peaceful state before returning home to rest. Perhaps today was not the day for weaving crystal after all.

The Changeling Prince returned his awareness to his body aboard the *Light Bearer*. He breathed a sigh of relief as he let himself relax into his bed. If that crystal had been forged, there was no telling the impact it would have on Zior.

Each crystal, each individual, each thought, wove itself into the mass connected framework of the universe. One corrupt crystal could lead to unforeseen destruction in others.

Still, the man had been saved, and there was a purpose to everything. The prince's gift was to shift form at will, traversing time and space for those of Zior in need. He walked the sands of time to breathe new life into the cracks of misperception. These recent disturbances in the harmony of Zior were surely part of some larger purpose as well, though he could not say precisely what form that purpose would take.

*I'm sure all will be revealed in time...*

With that thought, he let his body fall back to rest. His thoughts evaporated in the stillness of the night as he re-entered the world of infinite expansion, transformation, and creation. The Changeling Prince drew the covers up to his neck and climbed once more into the world of dreams.

## Chapter 35

Jorral clasped his hands together and bowed his head. Then he began to sing. A soft whisper soon gave rise to melodious cascading tones. Jorral was pouring his heart song out into the universe.

All of the joys, dreams, wishes, and unconscious love Jorral held within him came out in the notes of his song. His hands began to emit a soft red glow, as did his chest. Soon, tears of joy were rolling down Jorral's face, as the song grew louder, more passionate. A roaring burst of longing boomed out of his chest, only to shatter into silence. Then, fragile murmurs, releasing the last remnants of emotion within.

Jorral had unearthed an ocean of love for this particular heartsong. He was dredging up all the memories of all his years passed. Countless fibers of deep, deep seated emotion came rushing forward to coalesce in an amazing array of sound heavily laden with feeling.

The vibrations of the music carried out into the universe, stretching deep into the blackness between the dazzling light of stars. Further and further they twisted, crossing nebulae, galaxies, asteroids, and countless suns and moons. Until, at long last, the music of Jorral's heartsong found its own voice echoed in the center of a cluster of purple stars.

Jorral gasped when the music found its true home amidst the stars. The feelings that came exploding back were far beyond the comprehension of words. Jorral felt as if something deep within him had awoken. It was like a trillion tiny switches within him had been turned on all at once. He was electrified from within.

What was more, he felt a deep stirring of watery emotion within himself. Soothing, like an ocean filled with shimmering moonlight. His intellect was bursting with stimulating energy, his heart with the passionate flames of the soul.

Jorral now knew how to reach his home world. His true home amidst the stars.

*Come to me, Jorral. It is time we were reunited.*

Far away, but oh so much closer now, the voice of Jorral's dreams called to him, while still the eyes filled with the color of amethyst stared back at him, transfixing him with all the radiant magnificence therein.

## Chapter 36

Rax was sitting at his usual workspace, watching the readouts on the screen. If his eyes could be trusted, there were some pretty funny things happening to the meters. It was almost like the ship didn't know where it was. Rax could relate.

"Tysha, are you seeing what I'm seeing?" he asked through the comm system.

"If you mean something inexplicable and bizarre, dear, then yes, I am," she replied.

Jorral was standing on the bridge of the ship with the rest of the crew. He was attempting to stay focused on his surroundings, but it felt as if all his consciousness were being drawn towards the stars pictured on the screen, hovering just outside the ship.

"Where are we, Tysha?" Rax asked, perplexed.

"I couldn't begin to tell you." Tysha shrugged and shook her head in mild exasperation. "It looks like we've flown off the map completely. Once we passed that last galaxy, something very strange must have happened."

Rax thought he knew when that must have occurred. He felt the shift about an hour ago. It felt like he was spinning into vertigo, walking through a world of dreams. Blue Guy's rapid chattering seemed like a fevered vision. The Doc's languorous movements drizzled like sap across his field of vision.

Rax had felt this way before. The first time was when he was a boy playing Teklon ball with other children his age. As he ran to and fro across the field, trying to weave in and out of the other team's players, he began to feel quite strange. It seemed like he was not really playing at all, but more that he was aware of his activities from outside his body. The whole world had felt slanted somehow, like it was coated in a strange gelatinous haze. He felt dizzy and out of sorts, floating as he had.

The second time this happened was at a friend's house after ingesting some of the bright green and pink, sacred hallucinogenic Weesha flower. He had been playing around with creating various sounds on his Kolor, a keyed instrument made of 77 crystals of varying colors, on the lower level of his friend Katal's house. The Kolor was played by focusing one's energies and emotions into their hands, then touching one's fingertips to the various crystals. Rax was improvising, spontaneously creating a magical tapestry of colorful vibrations, when suddenly he felt as if he were drifting through a dream. As if he were present at Katal's more in awareness than actual embodiment. Everything had seemed fuzzy and slanted. His body had felt like a foreign vessel to him.

He felt that way now. Like the lines between reality were somehow out of phase. It was difficult to describe, but it was somehow different than meditation, where one is immersed in the world of spirit. Here was no man's land, the world of limbo betwixt waking consciousness and the multi-fractured mirrors of the soul.

The Changeling Prince saw and felt all this as well. Yet, for one whose identity was forged in the ever shifting sands of universal vision, one who traveled throughout the realms of reality's inner sight, this was but one reality amongst an infinite number. He saw and felt the shift, but his consciousness flowed through it all like water. Within the center of himself lay, as always, clear vision crystalized to shining perfection. Reality might be phasing in and out of different states, but his mind would hold its center, no matter the change.

"It is time, Jorral," the prince spoke.

Jorral inhaled deeply. He knew Alex was right. It was time he journeyed home.

"Tysha, will you please accompany me on this journey?" Jorral asked softly.

Tysha was taken aback for a moment.

"Why me?" she asked, feeling hypnotized by the stars outside.

"In truth, I do not know." Jorral slowly rubbed his jawline in thought. "I just somehow feel you have a role to play in this." Jorral's black eyes were at once unreadable and filled with the deepest pools of emotion. Something in the way he looked at Tysha made her feel as if all of the power of creation were gazing into her soul. It was impossible to deny such a request.

"Very well, I'll go with you. Now, tell me, where exactly are we going?" she asked, a ghost of a smile casting warmth across the otherwise icy surface of her face.

"There is a small moon near the center star. It is there we shall be headed," Jorral spoke in tones of certainty and wonder.

So, Tysha and Jorral prepared to fly a small craft, the *Pale Star*, to this unnamed moon.

As she was packing for whatever might lay ahead, the bell to Tysha's door sounded. She knew at once who it must be.

Rax entered, a mess of love, worry, and confusion.

"Oh Rax, are you alright?" Tysha asked compassionately.

"Tysha, I'm – I'm OK." He flung his arms around her, burying his face in her neck. Without warning, he started to cry.

"Rax, it'll be OK. Don't worry about me. I'll be back, I promise," she offered consolingly.

From the depths of his concern, sudden certainty took over Rax.

"I'm going with you. I know we've only been together a short time, but I feel like my heart is telling me not to let you do this alone." Rax's grip was intense, the fire in his eyes more so.

Tysha was in love with this man. A man so filled with dreams and emotion, covered by an illusionary toughness. A man capable of raging passion and uncontrollable fire once his heart had stirred. She knew he was right.

"Oh Rax, I love you," she said softly. Her hands caressed his face as she leaned in for a gentle kiss. For a moment all that existed was the peaceful, loving space between them. When they drew back from one another, the world re-entered their awareness, their spirits taking hold of their surroundings.

"But will Jorral mind?" she wondered out loud.

"Only one way to find out," Rax replied, smiling wickedly.

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"Are we all ready then?" Jorral asked as Rax and Tysha approached him.

"But, how did you know it would be both of us?" Tysha started.

"The dream we are currently acting out has been written in our spiritual DNA since before we were born. Only now have I begun to see the blueprint. Our choices may be limitless, but our present destiny is now a certainty. All possible worlds collapse into one eventually. At least, that is, from our current perspective"

Tysha and Rax looked at each other, then back at Jorral. The words of the singer were cryptic in a sense, but then perhaps part of their souls had understood. Clearly this man was operating under different parameters at the moment. Which was all for the best, as far as Rax was concerned. He still felt like a fish swimming through fog. In a world of haze where the fabric of reality was frayed as much as this one seemed to be, all bets were off.

"Shall we then?" Jorral inquired, a golden smile etching itself across his face.

They came to the moon just as the nearest star was falling behind the horizon. It would be totally dark on the moon in but a few short hours.

The surface was covered in grey, rocky terrain, with deep blue shades hiding in the crevices. Overhead, the sky was filled with crackling bursts of purple lightning and blue clouds. A fine mist hung over everything, and the three Ziorians had to tread carefully, lest they lose one another in the haze, or stumble amongst the rocks.

Jorral led the way, onward through the fog. They walked for a good while before coming to an

area where the mist finally gave way, giving them a clear vision of the moon's surface.

They were greeted with a spectacular view of a canyon carved into the surface of the moon. The rocky terrain stretched for miles in all directions, while the sky continued to sparkle with its streaks of purple electricity.

Jorral led them towards the lip of the canyon, then down, deeper and deeper, until they touched the canyon floor.

The feeling of being on that moon was indescribable. It felt almost like floating inside the womb while the universe tore itself apart outside. It felt like the central creative heartbeat of all existence had gathered its forces here for diffusion into the realms of infinite time and space.

There, in the distance now, they spied a tiny anomaly of some sort. It looked like it could be a part of the moon jutting out from the surface. Rax's senses told him otherwise.

As they approached the object, the feeling of wonder and excitement intensified. At once, Tysha perceived that they were walking through a field of electromagnetic star matter, invisible to their normal eyesight. She could not say how she knew this, but the knowing was there, all the same.

Then, there it was, the true shape of the object revealed. They were standing before an archway carved of light blue stone. All around the archway lay smooth purple rock, covered in a fine layer of blue dust. Rivulets of lightning blue ran through the sea of purple rock towards the arch.

Tysha was the first to break the silence.

“What is it?”

“The doorway home,” Jorral answered. “But it is as of yet still unopened, for the key has not been inserted into the lock.

“How do we open it then?” Rax asked, mystified. This place made him feel like he was floating at the center of his being. A vision within a dream, solidified on this moon.

“The key is, as with all things, love,” Jorral answered.

Jorral looked at Rax and Tysha, each in turn.

“Come, be seated. Let me guide you on this journey, as I have been guided within.”

With that, the two lovers sat. They clasped their hands together in a gesture of love and comfort. The feeling was so striking in contrast to the alien, and almost abyssal feelings of power and magnetism of the moon.

“Now, I want you to please close your eyes. Feel free to hold each others hands. The most important thing in this journey – and I cannot emphasize this enough – is that we hold ourselves open to the feeling of love. Do you understand?” Jorral asked them.

Tysha and Rax nodded. Love they understood well enough these days.

“Good. Now please, relax and begin to breathe deeply.”

It was no wonder that almost all meditations started in this manner. The breathe connected them to the life force most vital for existence on the physical plane. As such, it was an overwhelmingly loving force that permeated their very existence. Gentle, deep breaths filled them with the waters of love.

“Now that we are relaxed, please go back to when you were children. Don't be afraid of any images that arise. Simply notice what comes.”

Tysha began to see herself running through a field, chasing a narwuttle as it fluttered gracefully just ahead of her. Flowers stretched in all directions, their pleasant aroma filling the air.

She was with her parents, who stood a short distance behind. Suddenly, the field dipped down, and she came across a young boy playing by a small pond.

“What are you doing down here by yourself?” she asked him.

“I'm not by myself! I've got these turtles to keep me company,” the young boy replied with a bit of a scowl.

Tysha looked down and, sure enough, there was a small group of turtles there at the boy's feet.

“Oh, I see!! How cute!” Tysha bubbled.



“Yeah, I suppose they are,” the boy said, squinting at the sunlight as he turned his head up towards Tysha. “Anyway, I like em.”

Tysha squatted down beside the boy. “My name's Tysha. What's yours?”

“I'm Rax. Nice to meet you. Do you wanna go play in the fields with me?”

“Sure, Rax!”

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Rax looked within, and saw clouds. Clouds floating outside his window on a rainy day. He loved days like this – all the time in the world to read, feed his Garfel fish, or curl up under a blanket. He never understood why others so badly wanted for the sun to shine all the time. Sure, he loved the warmth and vibrancy as much as anyone. But nothing at all wrong with a little downpour. It was good for the soul.

Thunder boomed loudly as he turned back to his book about three flinder bugs and their great adventures through the Grasslands of the North. Then a torrent of rain began to fall from the sky, blanketing the land in moisture.

*So lovely!* Rax thought.

As he delved further and further into his book, the rain began to let up ever so slightly. The changing currents of the storm provided a wonderful sonic backdrop to the adventures in his book.

Suddenly, there came a change in the music. The sounds of splashing and a little girl giggling came gently crashing through the falling of the rain.

Rax looked outside, and there he saw a little girl playing. She had a smile so big it could cover the moon, Rax thought. He was delighted to see someone enjoying the rain as much as he was. Maybe he would go out and join her...

“Tysha, dear, come along sweetie! We want to catch a glimpse of the elder frogs before nightfall. Otherwise, we'll miss them completely,” a voice called to the little girl. Rax presumed it was her mother.

“Coming, Mommy!”

*Knew it.*

With that, Rax's hopes of joining his rain loving sister were held back for another day. Strangely, something seemed familiar about the girl. Something to do with water, and perhaps turtles.

Rax was now a little older and he didn't play with turtles quite as much, though he still loved them. He had just become interested in other things, is all.

Still, there was something about the girl...

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Awareness surged between Tysha and Rax. They had forgotten these small encounters! With them came others: a chance meeting under an ombo tree collecting the sweet ripe fruit that had fallen from its branches. Passing each other during a field trip to the crystal weavers' workshops when they were in their teens, neither quite aware that the other felt the same stirrings of romantic attraction and sexual interest that they had.

All their lives, they had been weaving a tale of love around one another. Starting with the mutual love found in the innocence of childhood, and culminating here in the deep commitment and conviction of adult love in the depths of space.

Love flared like a spiraling beacon of joy between them. They had turned inward to find themselves and in doing so, had found each other. The circle was complete, and the doorway was opened.

Light encircled the three companions then. Light echoed out upon itself until it filled their world

and engulfed all of their vision. It was light now that surrounded the archway. Brilliant white light tinged with the rosy hue of love. It was into darkness and the unknown that Jorral walked, however. Into the archway, and a pool of space void of any color whatsoever.

Then he was gone, leaving the star fated lovers to contemplate their bliss and a halo of purple light outlining the archway where once stood the man that had brought them to this, their current and most sacred communion.

# Chapter 37

Smoke, dust, the frail tendrils of the wind and the almighty power of its essence. Such was the vision Lexi beheld of the empires of civilization. So many torrents of growth and destruction. Old making way for new.

Zior was an electrified grid, alive with the power of its denizens. Their love was palpable as it shimmered across the globe in a dome-shaped pattern.

They moved like fireflies in the night, hurrying about on their live's errands. Moved by the power of natural forces, they danced in a flow of movement.

Lexi peered deep within the heart of his world, and there, in the still chamber at the center of it all, he beheld a still night sky. Untold numbers of stars filled the heavens, but what most ensnared Lexi's gaze was the sight of a single pale feather, shining faintly, falling to the earth below.

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“What is it Ferro, are you anxious to go for a walk?”

Ninnia's tiny blue friend wrinkled up his face in an adorable smile.

*That's a yes if I ever saw one.* Ninnia thought to herself.

Ferro trotted in a circle impatiently, eagerly awaiting Ninnia to rise and lead the way outside.

Dusk reigned on the land at that time. Thin golden fingers of light stretched out from the sun, savoring the day's final chance at caressing the earth.

Shadows were leaving their hiding spots within the underground and stepping out into the celebration of nights' imminent arrival.

Ninnia and Ferro stepped out into the walkway between homes and headed past a line of trees towards the cliffs.

“Mmmm boy! You get a whiff of that Nins?” Ferro cheerfully inquired, his face bouncing with energy.”

Ferro seemed delightfully happy to be inhaling the crisp scents of the limenberg trees. Their pungent aroma seemed to dominate the world, but there were other smells as well: damp soil, the dry bark of twigs, the salt of the sea carried over miles of earth by the wind.

Ninnia loved this time as well. She silently said a prayer to Sek to light their way to the cliffs and back home again. Immediately she felt her guide's presence envelop her in the warmth of unconditional love.

On they went, towards the cliffs, the sounds of the city fading into the background. Taking their place were the sounds of gulls and waves gently breaking on the rocks.

When they reached the cliffs, they stopped to stare at the sky and sea. The ocean was swallowing the sun in little gulps, cascading light sinking into the sea.

Atraxis, Zior's moon, began to make its appearance. Ninnia had often felt herself to be a child of the moon and sea. Something about the ebb and flow of the tides, and the magnetic pull of the moon over their lives enraptured her. She often dreamed of flying to the moon somehow. Of circling around its shining beauty, her soul sucking in all of its magic. Then she would dive gracefully into the sea below, to take up her rightful place as queen of the ocean deep.

“Perhaps that day is today,” Ninnia said to the wind.

Ferro turned his tiny eyes towards his friend. He looked at Ninnia quizzically, not understanding what she meant.

Something came then and darkened within Ninnia's vision. She looked absolutely entranced by

the vision of the moon. She moved suddenly, stepping directly out over the cliffs, her arms outstretched like a bird.

Faster and faster she fell, like a stone to the sea. Ferro could only watch in silent terror as Ninnia plummeted ever downward.

## Chapter 38

Jorral was falling through a sea of darkness. His arms and legs moved as if in slow motion as they cut through space. There was no visible end to his descent, and he felt as though he were falling forever. All time had ceased to exist for Jorral in that state.

As he fell, he began to notice his body disintegrating. His earthly shell was being slowly unravelled, revealing the energetic form within. He was dying a kind of death. Leaving behind the temporal and physical and plunging into the infinite. Now he was but an etheric entity, a light-filled body no longer possessed by the flesh. He had shed his shell of illusion and returned to the realms of light.

When next he became aware of his surroundings, Jorral found himself standing on the shores of a land very unlike any other. On this beach, no waves came, but rather, the vastness of space washed up towards him in rolling tides of blackness.

Infinity stretched before him as stars burned with their enigmatic life all around. Yet, Jorral was unafraid. He was infused with the power of purpose. His soul was his only pilot in this, his heart's ultimate quest.

Then, out of the stillness of the void came a vision of light. A boat in the form of a glowing serpent. It was enshrouded in yellow light, with two bright jewels set within the serpent's head.

Twelve beings rowed this boat, six to a side. They wore long robes of translucent light, appearing as specters from beyond the veils of time.

The boat came to rest before Jorral, and he stepped in. The twelve at the oars acknowledged his presence in a silent gaze and Jorral bowed his head in return. Then they were off, rowing through the empty seas of space and the all-encompassing star fields around them.

Onward they swam through the blackness, until, at last, they came upon a beach of sand. Jungle trees surrounded the land, and strange vines twisted everywhere. The murmurings of far away animals could be heard in the distance, causing small ripples of emotion to respond within Jorral's heart. The jungle called to him somehow. He could feel its life force speaking to him, calling him deeper.

So, he bid his farewell to the twelve aboard the boat. They returned his goodbyes with the swaying of their hooded faces and a host of frail whispers. Lastly, Jorral paid his respects to the spirit of the serpent itself. A powerful hissing, echoing out in waves into space, spurred him onward into the trees.

Red and gold birds stared down at Jorral as he pushed his way through vines and leafy ferns the size of his chest. Insects with dazzlingly bright blue shells scattered before him, sending their thoughts towards him.

All of these creatures seemed to know Jorral, to recognize his presence. He could not explain why, but he felt a powerfully deep connection to this place. Every stone, every flower was sacred to him. Every cry from the furry creatures that lived in the trees was a note of welcoming.

The feelings in his heart twisted ever faster, pulling him deeper into the jungle.

Droplets of water fell on his skin, pouring their knowledge into his being. Pockets of blue sky could be seen amidst the canopy, filling Jorral's mind with a longing to soar like the birds overhead.

Yet, now was the time to go further inward, deeper, twisting towards the heart of the jungle.

Sweat dripped down his light-body as he walked in a timeless march further and further. Water and heat rolled off his form and onto the earth below.

Finally, he felt as though his heart would surely burst. The damn had broke apart, and his mind's eye had snapped open, filled with recognition. There before him stood a temple, and within that temple, he knew lie the answer to his existence.

“Welcome home, Jorral. Welcome to Caxchal.”

The man spoke in a voice higher than Jorral's. It was a voice filled with mirth that danced off the man's tongue. His eyes jumped with an abundance of energy, and his smile caught Jorral in a web of emotion. It felt like he knew this man, but unlike the jungle, whose speech filled Jorral with a sense of home, this man's voice promised something else, something closer to mystery and the promise of a labyrinthine world of surprises.

“Who are you?” Jorral asked. His light body shimmered in the air. His hair, now outlined in sparks of electric yellow, floated gracefully in the wind. Brilliant and smooth eyes gazed strongly at the man.

“Who am I? Oh, no one in particular.” The man drew out his words with a slow upward twist of his mouth. “But you can call me Balez.”

The man wore loose fitting, plain colored pants and sandals. He was clean shaven, with dark, wavy hair poking out in all direction from under a cream colored turban, a single bright indigo jewel set in the center.

“Please tell me more about this place, Caxchal,” Jorral requested.

“Oh that? Let's just say Caxchal is kind of like the promised land, the land of jewels and riches. Where all your dreams come true,” Balez said with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes. “And me, well, I'm just a humble servant. A court jester, if you will. A man with so much wisdom inside it could fill a black hole, but you'll never see it, unless you can stop looking at all the pretty masks I wear, and cease laughing at my jokes.”

“Masks? Jokes?” Jorral asked, puzzled.

“Boo!” Balez shouted. His face had turned into a wooden masked shaped like a baboon's face and colored blue.

Jorral's gaze was unaverted. He had only one task in mind: enter through the temple into Caxchal, Hall of Dreams.

“Oh, a wise guy, eh?” Balez taunted. “Let's see how you like this one.”

“Help me, Jorral! I am falling into despair!”

Suddenly, Balez's face had taken a very familiar look. The soft and pleading voice he had used was Ninnia's.

Jorral flinched, his light body flickering in the air...but only for a moment.

“You are not Ninnia,” Jorral replied patiently.

“Rats! That one is usually a crowd pleaser,” Balez cursed. “Now, what if I told you...”

“We are all one.”

Now the voice struck a chord deep within Jorral. It was his own voice echoing back at him, Balez's face a mirror of his own.

“Is this what you see yourself as?” Balez asked.

The eyes of his twin were digging into Jorral's being, like knives twisting themselves into his skin, trying to burrow their way into his heart.

Suddenly, Jorral closed his eyes, and the vision shattered like glass into a thousand fingertips. Jorral laughed long and loud as the scattered pieces of the vision fell, leaving only his own inner sight.

When he opened his eyes, Balez stood before him once more. His eyes were filled with a crazed look of excitement. His thin lips were curved into a maniacal grin.

“Seems you have the stuff, friend,” Balez began. “Very well, step right up. This way to Caxchal, legendary land of your dreams.”

## Chapter 39

Lexi always thought that the tenacity with which he applied his rational mind would save the planet. In a way, he was right. If he hadn't been staring into the pool this evening, searching for a pattern to the seeming chaotic randomness of life, he never would have found the center of the realm, never have seen the falling feather.

It touched something within him, something long forgotten. It reminded him of the birds he used to watch as a child, and his dreams of flying with his friends. He used to run around with his arms outstretched as he led his friends in an imaginary flight across the universe. When he was asleep, they gathered together to fly over the sleeping grey city below them.

Now he would need those wings once again. The water had revealed the essence of the problem, as well as the location of the feather falling in flight. Now, he must hurry if he were to save it from plummeting into darkness.

He raced onward, towards the sea, letting go of his rational mind. The walls of serious pursuits he had built up over the years began to fall, stone by stone. Through the cracks came pouring the light of day, a sky filled with blue, and puffy clouds that hovered within the azure field.

Lexi was losing himself to the innocence of his forgotten childhood. Tears of joy ran down his face as his arms began to transform into wings. His wide-eyed exuberance carried him into the sky as he transcended the earthly pull and took to the heavens.

Gracefully, mightily, he soared higher into the sky, until at last, he was flying above the sea.

There below, he spied a beautiful woman falling ever faster towards the murky depths. He swooped down like a speeding ray of light, catching her in his arms just before she came crashing into the waves.

He carried her back to the land and lay her body on the ground. Hovering over her, he cast a radiant glow upon her face. Her body was covered in a thin sheet of seawater. It had been that close.

Ninnia rubbed her forehead with the back of her hand. She felt woozy, but safe.

"What happened?" she asked, her eyes slowly adjusting to the world around her, and the angelic young man above her.

"You were falling. I caught you," Lexi answered, his face lit up by a cherubic smile. He hadn't felt this good in years.

"Falling? What? I-" Then she remembered. The pull of the moon, the roaring of the sea, Ferro standing next to her, his face a picture of bafflement.

"Ferro! Oh no, what have I done?" Ninnia cried.

But her fears were baseless, as a furry little blue beast came trotting up toward her.

"Nin-nin!" Ferro cried.

"Oh, you must have been so worried!" Ninnia exclaimed

Ferro replied by licking her face and stampeding over her chest. Ninnia laughed. It felt so good to be alive.

"I can't thank you enough, er..."

"Lexi," he finished. "It's my pleasure. You don't know what you've given me tonight." Lexi's eyes filled with pools of light. His smiling face held so much beauty, Ninnia thought her heart would break then and there.

Ninnia merely smiled, however. Rescued by an angel. Life was indeed full of surprises.

"I just don't understand what happened," Ninnia said. "I felt fine until I began to look at Atraxis."

"Yeah! It's like you thought you were a bird or something!" Ferro exclaimed, his eyes bulging

slightly, face popping out in a version of mild shock.

“It is our waters,” Lexi concluded. “They have been corrupted somehow. I’ve been watching the subtle influences all over Zior. You are not the first to feel its ill effects.”

“Our water. Yes, if anything happens to the waters of life, it is only reasonable to assume our lives, indeed our very psyches would be affected,” Ninnia returned.

Lexi only nodded slightly. The matter troubled him greatly, and he knew not the solution.

“Oh, Jorral, where are you?” Ninnia pleaded to the sky, face drawn down in sadness, as tears spilled from her moonlit eyes. “If you can hear me, my love, speed on your way. Zior needs you. I need you.”



## Chapter 40

Balez led Jorral into the temple, down into the depths of Caxchal. Ancient runes carved into stone lined the narrow passageways as they made their descent.

Balez made strange laughing noises as he bounded down the passageways. Jorral remained silent, but even his footsteps echoed in those hollow hallways.

The runes glowed with a soft purple light, which was their only visual aid. Jorral felt his heart beat quicker as they came closer and closer to whatever lay at the center of his quest.

Suddenly, they spilled out into a large cavern. The rounded ceiling sparkled with miniscule blue gemstones, their light dazzling to behold. Across the cavern, Jorral saw three doorways carved into the rock face.

In a flash, Balez appeared to be occupying each of the doorways. His smiling visage taunted Jorral as he hopped from foot to foot.

“Three doors, Jorral. Yet, only one path may be chosen,” Balez cackled. “It is *you* who must do the choosing. None shall aid you in this task.”

Jorral looked to each of the doorways. Each appeared much the same as the last, with no distinguishing marks whatsoever. He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes. He gathered all his concentration and will, bringing the weight of his mind to bear on this decision.

*The center. Always hold to the center.*

With that, Jorral had made his choice. He stepped forward to pass through the central doorway.

As he stepped through, Balez vanished in a puff of smoke.

“Farewell, then, Jorral. May you find your dreams to be true in the heart of Caxchal.”

Jorral walked onward in darkness, the sound of Balez's words fading in the distance.

## *Chapter 41*

The Changeling Prince floated in a meditative state. Things were shifting rapidly on Zior. He was bouncing around like a wild animal, trying to quell the fires ignited within the mind frame of the populace.

A nervous feeling here, a worried glance there, and soon the air was filled with the delicate vibrations of tension. He had seen this before, in the days before the Great Crossing. It was an air of distress taken for granted by the populace. Disease was normal, the waking state often fraught with stress and confusion.

He wouldn't, couldn't let things get any worse. He gathered all his energy as he never had before, calling upon his shadow selves in other dimensions, other lifetimes. Their energy and the energy of his guides, coupled with the energy of the very universe itself. It gave him strength enough to comfort the multitude of souls caught in the tumultuous sea of corrupt energy signatures. They had all ingested fragmentary structures that had caused the cellular structure, both biologically and spiritually, to mutate in unexpected ways.

How long could he go on like this? The universal energy he drew upon for strength was unlimited, but the chaos was great. He steadied his mind and heart, and plunged into the center of Zior.

There he found the great crystal nexus and the Council of the Twelve Elders of Zior. They were all linked in a meditative circle as they tried to hold the magnificently woven crystal together.

The Changeling Prince could see the structure shaking oh so delicately, its foundation rumbling with the surging energy of chaos. How long could the nexus hold?

He drew breathe deep into his being and began to aid the Council in their efforts. He would hold on as long as he could, preserving the very core of Zior's existence until all the light had faded from his being.

## Chapter 42

Jorral found himself again falling forward in darkness. Visions of stars and collapsing worlds filled his mind. As he fell, all the images of his past came rising up from within him. Walking through the trees as a boy. The first animal he ever spoke with, a blue jayala bird. His first taste of Ninnia's lips, the color of sunset, the feeling of the warm summer air as it passed over his naked body. Such freedom, so many avenues of joy. Limitless prismatic experiences had filled his days. He was filled with peace at his journey.

Down he spiraled into blackness, until at last, he came to rest lightly on a floor made of smooth stone. When he looked up, he saw that he was in a small chamber. There before him was a man, a man with purple eyes, the very same set of amethyst colored eyes that had so haunted Jorral's dreams.

"You," Jorral declared.

"Welcome, Jorral, welcome, welcome, welcome," the man exclaimed delightedly. He clasped his round hands together with enthusiasm, his face a picture of warmth and emotion. He looked like he was greeting his long lost son. He had light brown skin and wore the faintest trace of a mustache. As with Balez, he too wore plain cloth pants and a turban, only his outfit was white, and a purple stone rested in the center of his turban.

"The color of wisdom," the man proclaimed. "At least, it is here at Caxchal."

"Who are you?" Jorral asked, his face swimming in wonder.

"My name is not terribly important," the man began, taking a step forward. "Let us say instead, what my function in this vessel as it relates to you, is." The man's purple eyes shone like jewels in the faint light of the chamber.

Jorral's mind reeled with the possibilities. Who was this strange man? What role did he play in his life? As he had countless times before in his life, he took a deep breathe and looked within.

A vision came roaring up from within him then. He saw himself as a cluster of energy, star matter moving in a nebulous cloud. He had no definite shape, but his awareness was keen. He was alive, awake to his own true self and the way of the universe. His awareness was pure, crystalized to shining perfection.

Then he saw a man. A man with kind eyes that sparkled like jewels. Between his hands was an intricate web of energy, six pointed stars with a great flower spiraling outward. Such delicate and precise beauty. Jorral's awareness locked with the man's eyes. The intention of his gaze filled Jorral's soul with an unmistakable feeling.

It was love, and it was pulling him in. He drifted softly towards the man, the web of energy gently imprinting itself on his awareness. His light body was now infused with the pattern of universal love, the very framework of all the universe.

"You were the man who helped shape my destiny," Jorral whispered, awestruck.

"Yes, Jorral," the man started softly, "I was there even before you had a body."

Jorral smiled. "Yes, I remember now. You must know you have my eternal gratitude."

"And you mine. Love must be shared to be truly appreciated."

Jorral nodded silently. Coming here was like coming home in so many ways. Yet he could not forget the other world he had called home for so many years. Zior called to him in its moment of greatest need. He could not abandon it now.

"If this is truly the promised land of dreams, then I have a favor to ask of you," Jorral told the man.

"You have only but to ask," the man replied seriously, his mustache falling softly to the sides of his face. "You have passed every test and returned to your place of origin pure of heart and mind. No

more can be asked of anyone.”

“Then hear my request, that the waters of Zior be returned to their former state of divine purity. That my race be made whole once more, and the heart of my planet mended.”

“So it shall be done, Jorral,” the man replied quietly. “You have only to interface with the core of Caxchal, and your wish will be granted. But only if you are pure of intention and clear of all distractions. Think on this well before you begin to transmit your dream to the universe.”

“I will do as you say,” Jorral replied, steadying himself for what was to come.

“Good. I shall leave you alone then. Behind me, you shall find the crystalline altar which holds the heart of Caxchal within itself. Whatever intentions you set when you take hold of the crystal will soon become manifest. I wish you the very best,” the man replied earnestly, a warm smile on his face.

“Thank you,” Jorral replied with deep gratitude.

So he turned to go, leaving Jorral alone in that chamber at the heart of all dreams.

Before him was an enormous, clear crystal, carved in the shape of an obelisk. Jorral had never seen a crystal so pure. It filled him with a sense of awe. Within that crystal lie the power to manifest any reality whatsoever. Jorral's head spun with thoughts of infinite worlds and untold futures.

Now, however, he must concentrate. The fate of Zior depended upon this task. He gathered his mental strength, and began to breathe.

Slowly, ever so slowly, he allowed his inner vision to open to the true essence of his heart. What he yearned for was a complete restoration of the waters of Zior and, with any luck, to return home as well.

He thought of all those who had touched his life on Zior. The children whose laughter reminded him to play. The old woman who shared uplifting chakra energy with him. The loving family that had raised him to be the strong and compassionate man he was today. The birds of the sky and the plants that cleansed the air relied upon these visionary waters as well. Jorral had always felt deeply connected to them, and, in fact, deeper still to the planet as a whole.

Every cell within him radiated this love for his home world. His heart was open, and his mind was as water. He began to sing, filling the air with the echoes of this timeless, boundless love. Soaring melodies and deep bass notes filled the chamber. Jorral left nothing behind in this, his song of songs. When his song reached the height of its ecstatic movements, Jorral poured his loving intention into the crystal.

It was like a single drop of water plunging into the sea and causing a roaring tidal wave to burst forth from the depths. Jorral's intention rang true. White light shot out like a flash from the crystal, erupting into space. Across the void it flew, further and further on its mission of resurrection. Finally, it came smashing into the crystalline heart of the planet, filling the nexus with light.

Now, the great healing powers of Zior had awoken. Their mighty energy ran like so many rivers throughout the planet, until at last they reached the waters of life. All the love and light of the planet swirled through the waters until, at last, all traces of darkness had vanished from the visionary pools. Their purity had been restored, returning peace to the sacred children of Zior.

# Epilogue

"It's quite magnificent, isn't it?" Jorral asked.

"Oh, Jorral, it's simply *beautiful*," Ninnia gushed.

"I'll say!" Ferro said, adding a yelp of approval, provoking Jorral to give him a playful rub of the head. It felt so good to be once again surrounded by the familiar faces of home.

They were marveling at the means of Jorral's return to Zior, the one lasting remnant of the force that had healed their planet.

In the sky, stretching out into space, was a bridge of shining, solid light.

"Now we will never lose our way to Caxchal, the land of dreams," Jorral stated happily.

"Should we ever need a reminder of our true, original essence, we need only to look to the love that lights the sky."

"What do you see in that bridge, dearest?" Ninnia wondered.

"I see all the hope, dreams, and memories of a people writ large. The many separate parts unified in a journey from earth to space, heart to mind, body to soul."

"You do possess wonderful vision, Jorral. It is fortunate you were chosen for this mission."

"Just as I am so very fortunate to have you by my side, my love."

They smiled with true joy then, their eyes entwined, filled with the deepest loving.

They walked hand in hand along the shores of Zior, the waves lapping at their feet, whispering of things long since past, and of things yet to be.

*The*

*End*

## About the Author

Brian Honeycutt has been dreaming of strange worlds filled with odd looking creatures and fantastically magical voyages since he was a child. He has had short stories published in various small print and online magazines around the world, written for *Exploding Plastic*, an electronic music magazine, and written one novel, *Visions of A Dying Mind*, detailing one man's odyssey into the realms of the unreal.

Now with *The Waters of Zior - A Heart Song*, he has produced a work that provides a view into a world filled with light and love. Brian's forays into angelic communication, meditation, past life regressions, raw foods, and higher spiritual truths provide the seeds with which the world of Zior is sewn. Insightful and profound viewpoints are woven into a tale that is filled with adventure, mystery, and lighthearted glee.

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Brian Honeycutt is also an astrologer, angelic light worker, and spiritual teacher. To learn more about these services, visit: [angelicastrologymagic.com](http://angelicastrologymagic.com)

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