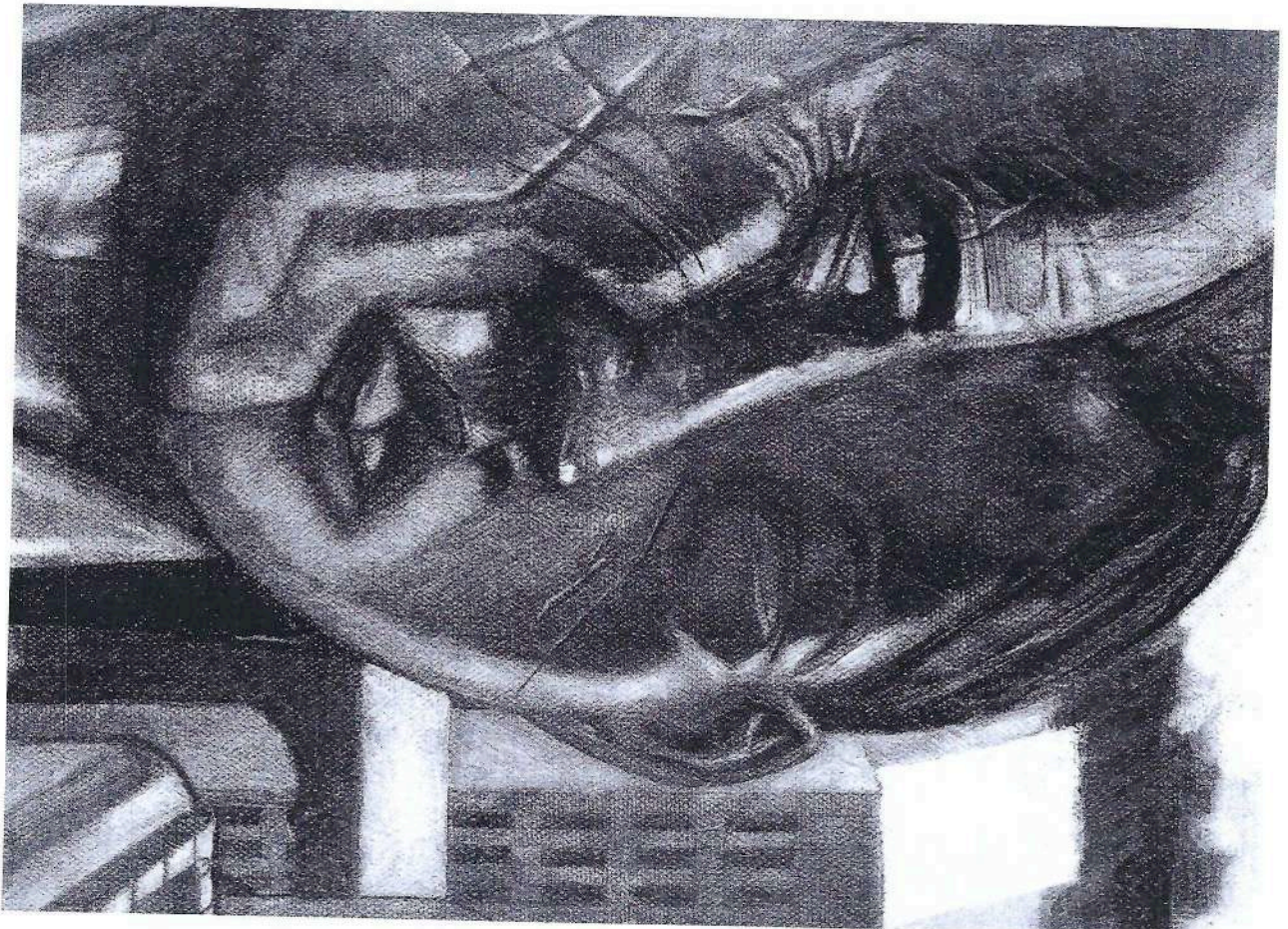


NALO HOPKINSON & UPPINDER MEHAN eds



SO LONG BEEN DREAMING

Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy



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Mars. Then the asteroid belt, maybe. And the moons of Jupiter. By the time I have kids, the stars. There'll be other planets. Other worlds. Maybe with intelligent life. We have to go there."

"We can barely live on the Moon," I argue. "Billions of dollars and space suits and thousands of people to make it happen. And the Moon is just next door, isn't it? It's just a few thousand miles away."

He gives me that look, and I hide myself for bating him. The Moon is 240,000 miles away. I've been following everything too.

Anthony clamps down his molars on a chunk of lamb and tears it from the skewer. "Things'll be different by the time we get to the stars," he says. "We'll be different. I read a story about it. If we find life out there, we'll change ourselves to be more like what we find. We'll make our bodies and brains different. We won't even have to come back home. We'll be so well adapted that we can survive wherever we land as efficiently as the native aliens."

Native aliens.

I let the paradox pass.

Removing the satay from the grill, I lay the skewers down in neat rows on a plate. "But, what if the life we find out there doesn't want us? What if they see us as a threat? People come to a new land, and they want to change it. They want to make it like the place they came from, and they want to be top dog. Visitors who refuse to go home aren't really visitors."

"We'll be welcome," he says, with so much confidence that I feel my heart fissure, "because we'll come with peaceful intentions."

This is a moment, now. This is a moment in which I could press the issue. I could bring to bear my thirty-five years of life experience, of scratches and bruises and scars and calluses. I could strip away every one of my son's naive sentiments and make him see the world as it is. I have seen blood in the dirt. I bet I could make my son see it too.

I hand him the plate of satay. "Bring this to the kitchen. And then watch your spacemen walk on their rock"

"Astronauts," he says, taking the plate. "And it's not just some rock. It's a world."

I pierce more lamb chunks onto skewers. "Okay. Have it your way. A world. Tell me if the astronauts find something good on their new world."

He gives me his look and takes the satay kambing into the house.

I stay in my backyard and look to the sky.

There's nothing to see there, but I look on my son's behalf, praying that he'll never have to see what I see.

Celu Amberstone was one of the only young people in her family to take an interest in learning Traditional Native North American crafts and medicine ways. This made several of the older members of her family very happy, while annoying others. Though legally blind since birth, she has spent much of her adult life avoiding cities. She has lived in the rain forests of the west coast, a tepee in the desert, and a small village in Canada's arctic. Along the way she also managed to acquire a BA in cultural anthropology and an MA in health education. A teacher of cross-cultural workshops and traditional Native ways, Celu loves telling stories and reading. She now lives in Victoria, British Columbia near her grown children and two grandchildren.

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Refugees

Celu Amberstone

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 1

This morning I arose early and climbed to the Mother Stone on the knoll above the village. The sun was just rising above the blue mists on the lake. The path smelled of tree resin and flowering moss. I took in a deep breath and sang to the life around me. I was shivering by the time I reached the Mother Stone and made the first of my seasonal offerings to Tallav'Wahir, our foster planet.

I cut open my arm with the ceremonial obsidian knife I carried with me, and watched my blood drip into the channel carved into the stone for that purpose. Blood. The old people say it is the carrier of ancestral memories, and our future's promise. I am a child from the stars – a refugee, driven from my true home. My blood is red, an alien colour on this world.

But I am lucky because this planet knows my name.

☪

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 2

I should rejoice in the renewal of life, but with this Awakening Moon my heart is sad. Always before one of my daughters has been with me to share this special time. Now they are all gone. My youngest daughter married last harvest and moved to a village across the lake. I miss her. My dear old man, Tree, says I should be glad to be done with that cycle of my life. But if I still crave the company of children, he is sure that my co-wife Sun Fire would be happy to share. He says this with a smile when he sees my long face, and truly the children left in the compound are more than a handful for us. But though I love them all – including my widowed sisters – it isn't quite the same. I pray that Tuktá's marriage will be a happy one, and blessed with healthy children. Oh Mother, how we need healthy children.

☪

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 7

Today our Benefactors confirmed our worst fears. Earth is now a fiery cloud of poisons, a blackened cinder. When it happened, our ancient soul-link with Earth Mother enabled us to sense the disaster even from this far world across the void. Tallav'Wahir felt it too. But we told our foster planet mother that our life patterns were sound. Our Benefactors would help us. Such a tragedy would never happen here. There was a great outpouring of blood and grief at the Mother Stones all over the world. The land ceased to tremble by the time the ceremonies ended.

☪

Leaf-Budding Moon, sun-turning 3

The star shuttle arrives with our new wards tomorrow – twenty-one of them for our village. What an honour to be given so many. Dra'hada says that the crew won't awaken them from cold-sleep until just prior to their arrival. When they are led out, they will be disoriented, and we will have to be patient with them. Dra'hada has assured me that our implants and theirs have been attuned to the same frequency so that we can communicate

easily, and that is a relief. I wonder what these new people will be like. I am excited, and maybe a little afraid too. All the wars and urban violence we've heard about, I hope they can adjust to our simple ways. It's been a long time since our Benefactors have brought settlers to Tallav'Wahir to join us. We desperately need these newcomers. Tallav'Wahir is kind, but there is something in this adoptive environment that is hard on us too. We aren't a perfect match for our new home, but our Benefactors have great hopes for us.

☪

Leaf-Budding Moon, sun-turning 4

It is moonrise, and it's been an exhausting day for all of us. I was near the front of the crowd when the shuttle set down on the landing pad. I thought I was prepared for anything. How wrong I was. They are so alien. It is hard to believe we are the same species. The situation on Earth deteriorated so fast that the ship was forced to gather what survivors were available without delay. There was no time to select the suitable. The sorting will have to be done here, I suppose, and that is unfortunate. Culling is very stressful for everyone. Most of the people assigned to our village were dazed and confused, but some were angry too. Maybe they were afraid of our Benefactors, and that might account for their rude behaviour. Filthy lizards indeed. They are an unsettling addition to our village, and the land feels it too.

☪

Leaf-Budding Moon, sun-turning 5

Dra'hada says, even though they look and act so differently, they all come from a large city called Vancouver. We have three staying in our family's compound. When I first saw the young woman given to us, my heart pounded like a drum. I'd caught only a glimpse of her in profile, and I thought my daughter Tuktá had returned to me. Then she turned to face me and the resemblance vanished. It was an unsettling experience nonetheless. Her features at times still remind me of Tuktá's, but in no other way are they the same!

This girl is of medium height, golden-skinned, and very, very thin. She was wearing tight black pants, and black boots with high heels that make her walk funny. She also had on a black shirt, very sheer – I could see her

tiny nipples pressed against the fabric. Over that she wore a black leather jacket with lots of silver chains. Her hair is short, spiky, and blue. She has a ring in her nose and several in her ears, and a pudgy baby that cries a lot. She told us her name was Sleek. Jimalbot, one of our other charges, says that isn't her real name, just a "street name." I'm not sure what he meant by that, but I'll wait and ask him later.

Jimalbot is one of the few older adults left in our care. Unlike Sleek, he has pale skin and grey streaks in his short brown hair. His face is a bit puffy, and his belly soft. Dradhada says we will have to watch him because his heart is weak. Jimalbot told me that he was a professor at the university. He has lively blue eyes and is very curious about everything. I like him the best of the lot.

Our third fosterling, given into Tree's care mostly, is a sullen, brown-skinned youth whose "street name" is Twace. He wears a bright-coloured cloth tied around his head and baggy striped pants. I don't like his angry eyes or the colour of his aura. It is filled with red and murky grey patches. When he looked around our compound and saw the neat round dwellings with their sturdy mud walls and mossy roofs, the thatched stable for our woolly beasts, and the shady arbor where my loom sits, his mouth curled in contempt.

They are abed now – finally. Tomorrow we will have to get them suitable clothing and bring them to the Mother Stone on the knoll. I hope they won't be too frightened by the adoption ceremony.

✧

Leaf-Budding Moon, sun-turning 6

We tried to prepare our fosterlings for the proceedings, but no amount of assurance on our part seemed to ease their minds. All were anxious, and some had to be dragged screaming and cursing to the Mother Stone while an elder made the cut for the required blood offering. Sleek was one of the worst. She kicked and clawed at the men who brought her forward, and no amount of assurance on my part could calm her.

When we returned home, Sleek was a mess. Her arms and face were bloody, and her alien clothes were ruined. I saw my neighbours' pitying glances as we took her away. My widowed sister and my co-wife, Sun Fire, helped me strip off her clothing and get her cleaned up. I was so ashamed for our family.

"Ignorant savages, cannibals, leave me alone, goddamn you!" she shouted at us as we washed her.

"It's all right, daughter, calm down. Come now, it was only a little blood; it didn't really hurt to make the gift. No one is going to eat you. The blood was given to the Stone so that our foster planet mother could taste you. Now She will know you as one of her own. We all make such offerings; it is one of the ways our Benefactors have taught us to commune with the soul of the land. Such traditions were practiced on Earth once – didn't you know that?"

"Screw traditions – and the lizards," she snarled and threw the new dress I was trying to hand her to the floor. "I want my own clothes – what have you done with my things, bitch?"

"Don't talk to your foster mother like that," my sister said. "Show her more respect."

Sleek opened her mouth to reply, but I spoke quickly to forestall another outburst. "I'm sorry, Sleek, but it was necessary to get rid of those alien things. They aren't in harmony with life here. You must wear and use the natural things provided by *this* planet now. Their manna will help you commune with Tallav/Wahr. These ways may seem harsh to you at first, but they are important. Our elders and our Benefactors know what is best for us – truly they do."

Sleek gave me a withering look, but took the simple dress I handed her. While the fabric was over her head, I heard her mumble something about ignorant savages talking to dirt. "Our Benefactors know best," she mimicked as her head cleared the opening. "Well, they're not *my* benefactors. You people are pathetic. Damned lizards have you humans living like primitive savages while they fly around in their spaceships."

Her words were meant to cut, but I thought I saw tears in the corners of her eyes, so I bit back my angry response. "We know about the high technologies," I told her quietly. "We use what you would call computers, air cars, and other technical things too. But to help you make the repatterning, we decided that a simple lifestyle would be best for all of us for a time. There is no shame in living close to the land in a simple way, daughter."

"Our Benefactors teach us that technology must never interfere with our Communion with the Mother, lest we forget the Covenant, grow too greedy, and destroy our new home."

Sleek's face flushed a deep crimson, and she probably would have said more rude things to me, but at that point her baby began crying in the yard outside, and she took that as an excuse to leave us. When she was gone, my sister Sun Fire and I looked at one another in exasperation. Her behaviour could try the patience of a stone.

✧

Flowering Moon, sun-turning 7

The planting is over. It was a nice change to play with the children on the beach today. The water in the lake is already warm enough for a swim. Sleek and I played with them for hours in the shallows by the shore. Her face relaxed; she looked younger and seemed so happy, and that made me happy too. Maybe she and the others can adjust to our ways after all.

☞

Flowering Moon, sun-turning 9

Jimalbot rubs his fourth finger when he thinks no one is looking. Like the others he was forced to give up everything from his past, including the narrow gold ring that used to be on that finger. Just now when I went out to relieve myself, I heard someone sobbing quietly in the shadows under the te'an tree. When I went to investigate, I saw Jimalbot. I sat down beside him and took his hand. "What's so wrong?" I asked him. He sniffed and tried to pull his hand out of mine, but I held on and repeated my question.

"Nothing really – I'll be all right ... I was just thinking about home – and my dead wife. She was visiting her mother in Toronto when it happened. The whole eastern part of the country was annihilated, from what Dra'hada told me."

"Such thoughts are more than nothing, Jimalbot. I can't imagine losing so much; it must be terrible. I think you and the others are very brave."

He shook his head; I could see the gleam of unshed tears in his eyes by the lantern light. "Not brave at all. Your *Benefactors* gave us no choice."

There was such harshness to his voice when he said those words that I shivered and wrapped my shawl tighter around my shoulders. "They are your *Benefactors* too," I pointed out to him. "Would you rather have had them leave you to die?"

He was silent for a long time. Finally he said, "I don't know, Qwalshina. It is all so different here – I don't know if I have the courage to live in this place."

Surprised by his confession, I raised his hand to my lips and kissed it. "Surely you can; we are all here to love and help you. You aren't alone here – and if you wish a new wife –"

At that point, he disentangled his hand from mine and stood up. "Thank you for your concern, Qwalshina. You are very kind. I think I shall go back to my bed now. Good night"

I went back to my own bed with a troubled heart. The little ring was such a small memento. Did we do right to make them give up everything? Our *Benefactors* advised it, but....

☞

Flowering Moon, sun-turning 25

Last night, there was an argument down by the beach that ended with Sand Walker and one of the new men being injured. Everyone is so upset today, and Dra'hada was furious when he heard about it. He told me that such violence wouldn't be tolerated. Why can't the new ones see how lucky they are? These people were saved from death; why are they so angry? I don't understand them. I wish they'd never been brought here.

No, that isn't true; we need them....

☞

Korn-Growing Moon, sun-turning 11

I had to make a difficult decision yesterday about Sleek. Her baby was suffering. She would shout and curse the babe more often than she would feed or care for the boy. Today the women's council came to take the baby away. She cursed us in the vilest terms. Judging by her behaviour later, however, I think she is secretly relieved to be rid of the child. The council gave the little one to Auntly Shell to foster. Granny Night Wind says the boy is doing better already.

I look at Sleek's hard eyes and I wonder what is wrong with her. Can't she feel any emotion but anger? How could she be so indifferent to her own child's welfare? I remember how it was when we lost my oldest daughter's first born. Poor unfortunate mite – we were all distraught when he had to be culled.

☞

Korn-Growing Moon, sun-turning 16

Our medicine woman, Granny Night Wind, thinks we will have a good crop this harvest season. Tallav'Wahur, we live in harmony with Her cycles. She feeds us, Her spirit helps protect us, and in return we bury our shit and our dead in her rich gray soil so that She can absorb our essence, swallow

our memories, and unfold us in the oneness of Her living soul. My daughter Tuktá's face comes into my mind – she is so young, and so happy. Will the land love and bless her, make her one of Her favoured ones? Oh, I pray it will be so.

o/o

Berry Moon, sun-turning 2

There was a great bonfire down on the beach last night. We baked fish on sticks, and ate berries cooked with sweet dumplings till our bellies grew hard and round. In the long green twilight, we played running games. Then someone brought out a drum and that started everyone singing and dancing. Our Twace and two boys in my cousin Rain's compound can drum very well. I danced till I thought I would fall over from exhaustion. Later Tree, Sun Fire, and I crept off to a quiet place by the spring where we made sweet love under the stars. Some time during the night Tree's unmarried brother Sand Walker joined us and that was good too.

o/o

Berry Moon, sun-turning 9

When I was working at my loom this evening Sleek came over unexpectedly and sat down beside me. She seemed curious, and maybe a little interested. None of my other children have the talent to be a master weaver. It would be a shame for the family to lose such a skill when I become too old for the craft. Some of our Benefactors pay high prices for our art back on their Homeworld. I let her watch for a time, then I asked, "Would you like me to show you how to do this?" She shrugged, but didn't get up and leave. Best not frighten her away, I thought, so I just continued on with my work.

After a while she volunteered, "My grandmother used to weave – it looked something like that"

Startled, I stopped my work and turned to face her: "Really? That's very interesting. What kind of things did she make?"

"I don't remember exactly; I was pretty young when she died.... I remember one thing she made, though. It had bright colours; I used to tangle my fingers in its long fringes." She smiled at the memory, and added, "It was probably something ceremonial, a dance cape maybe. A lot of the old women in our tribe used to make them for the potlatch ceremonies."

"Pot-a-latch." My tongue stumbled over the unfamiliar word. "Was this

a ceremony of your people held to honour the Earth Mother?"

"I don't know", my mom never took me to one."

I went back to my weaving at that point. I could see she was becoming nervous by my questioning. *Be careful, Qwalshina, or you will frighten her away*, I told myself. But inwardly I smiled as I twined the yarn back and forth between the rope strands on the loom. Truly our Benefactors are wise. Dra'hada knew how much I was missing Tuktá, and gave me a new daughter of the same racial stock as my own. At that moment I felt very good about knowing that. It made me feel a little closer to her.

On impulse I asked her, "How old are you?"

She seemed startled by my question, and her eyes narrowed with suspicion at first, then she relaxed. "The lizards didn't tell you?"

"No. I never asked our Benefactors. Is your age a secret? Would you tell me?"

She gave me another shrug. "No secret. Eighteen. Why?"

"I was just curious." Eighteen. I forced myself to go back to my weaving. *Gently, gently, Qwalshina*, I told myself. "You are about the age of my third daughter. She got married recently and moved to another village. I miss her. I'm glad you are here to take her place."

Sleek snorted. "I don't have much use for *mothers*, so don't get your hopes up about making me your new daughter – or teaching me that silly string stuff either."

She made me angry then, and I allowed my evil tongue to say something cutting in return. "Maybe if you had been more willing to be *mothered* you could have done a better job of being a mother yourself, instead of abusing your baby."

Sleek jerked back as if I'd slapped her – which in a way I had. I saw the hurt in her eyes for just a moment and then it was gone, replaced by her habitual sullen anger. She stood up and glared down at me with such contempt that it made my bones shiver. "You people make me sick," she spat back.

"You think you're so wonderful and know what's best for everyone, don't you? Well, let me tell you about my mother. She was a drunk who let her boyfriends fuck me whenever they wanted; then told me it was my fault for being a slut. I never wanted to be a mother – fuck mothers – all mothers. Who needs any of you?"

I stared after her with tear-filled eyes. Why had I said that? I'm so ashamed. Now I understand a little more why she acts the way she does, but that doesn't excuse my behaviour. I must go to the Mother Stone, make an offering, and try to regain my internal harmony. Like a disease, these people are destroying our peace. And, if I am honest with myself, I

must admit that Sleek and the others frighten me. Her questions and her anger make me uncomfortable. Is she right? Are we too complacent and judgmental? I have to go help Sun Fire with the children.

☯

Korn-Ripening Moon, sun-turning 17

The entire village is in an uproar after what happened last night. Someone stole some of Granny Night Wind's uskajac. It was fermenting in a big wooden barrel at the back of her compound. When Sand Walker went to check on the brew, he found the barrel only half full. Granny Night Wind was furious. She threatened to give the persons responsible a bad case of "the itch" when she finds them. Whoever did it is either very brave – or crazy. She is a powerful shamanka; the spirits obey her. Still, it was funny to see her stomping around, looking under everything – people leaping out of her way – or jumping to do her bidding.

☯

Rain-Comes-Back Moon, sun-turning 2

These young ones, so corrupted by poor food and alien drugs, have grown up spindly, like unhappy plants shaded from the sun. The last human crop of their tormented, polluted world is a pitiful one indeed. Will their life-patterns be suitable to mingle with ours? My people need the flow of new genes or we may perish in spite of all our Benefactor's efforts. I am so afraid for my children. The birth defects and terminations are so many. I fear for my daughter Tukta. She is so young and so happy with her new man.

Ah, but Dra'hada says not to give up hope. We will salvage what we can from this last harvest. And if that is not enough, our Benefactors will collect the seeds of other worlds and crossbreed them with ours. Our descendants may not be the same in appearance as we are, but some part of us will survive. And the land will always remember us. Our bodies will lie in the cool ground until the blood memories of our species have passed into the crystals of the bedrock itself.

☯

Rain-Comes-Back Moon, sun-turning 4

Jimtalbot and Bethbrant were troubled by a crazy rumour they'd heard, and came this evening to ask me if it might be true.

"One of the guys from Earth living at Black Rock Village said that Earth isn't really destroyed," Jimtalbot told me.

I looked into their troubled faces and felt a shiver run down my spine. "What? Why would he say such a thing? Of course the Earth Mother is gone. Why else would our Benefactors have brought you here?"

"Why indeed, Qwalshina? Jimtalbot said, "Could the – uh – Benefactors be planning some weird experiment? Something that they need live humans, or human body parts for?"

I was shocked, speechless. "Experiment? No, of course not. That's preposterous. Who said such a thing? I must tell Dra'hada; who is it?"

Their expressions became closed at that point. Jimtalbot mumbled that he didn't know the man's name, but I was sure he was lying to me. He looked at Bethbrant and they started to walk away, but I stopped them. "Please wait. If you don't wish me to tell Dra'hada, Jimtalbot, I won't, but listen to me. There is no truth to this rumour. I felt Earth Mother's death agony myself – through the Communion – we all did. The pain was almost unbearable. Truly. She is gone. And, there is no planned experiment. Our Benefactors only wish us well."

"If your people were also a part of their design, you might not be aware of the experiment either," Bethbrant said.

"No, we would know if they were using us in that way. We have been here for generations. My father was a man of the Tsa'La'Gui people. His ancestors were brought here when pale-skinned invaders from across a big ocean came and took their land. My mother's people came here long before my fathers. They were Crunich and lived on the island of Erin before the black-robed ones with their dead god came and stole the island's soul. There are others from Earth Mother here too, rescued from disaster as you were. Our Benefactors wish only good for us. And, no matter our origin on Earth, we are all one people now, the children of Tallav'Wahir. There has never been any experiment. Please believe me."

When I finished talking to them, they seemed convinced that it was all a crazy, made-up lie. But later the children told me that a group of our charges walked down the beach together to talk something over in private. Did I do right to promise not to tell Dra'hada? This is very troubling. I must go to the Mother Stone and tell Her my concerns.

☯

Falling Leaves Moon, sun-turning 5

Sleek's tattooed friend and six other youths have developed a terrible case of "the itch." No common healing remedy has worked. Poor lads – I know they're miserable – and I shouldn't laugh at their misfortunes, but it is funny to watch them trying to scratch all those hard-to-reach places. Rain's twins were in on the scheme. One of them finally broke down and confessed. About half of the stolen uskajak was brought back. Granny is keeping the offenders in suspense for one more night, but she told me privately that she would forgive them, and give them a healing salve tomorrow.

*Falling Leaves Moon, sun-turning 25*

Sleek and I took the children for a walk on the knoll today. We piled up great mountains of leaves and had fun jumping into them. I tired before they did, but felt so good just watching them. I think my new daughter loves playing like a child when none of her Earth friends are around to ridicule her. She is recreating the happy childhood she didn't have on Earth, and it is a joy to see her so.

Later we gathered siba fruit and roasted it on sticks over an open fire, and everyone sang songs. I found myself wishing Tukta could have been there to share the day with us. When we were heading home the children raced ahead as usual, but Sleek waited for me on the trail and fell into step beside me as I passed. I smiled and she returned the gesture.

In the dappled light under the trees, her face suddenly seemed to metamorphose into that of an ancient. Expressing wisdom far beyond her years, she said to me, "I had fun with you today, but I'm not Tukta, Qwalshina. Please try to remember that." There was no anger in her voice for once; the smells of tree resin, spicy siba, and a lazy afternoon had drained her of hostility.

Startled, I paused on the trail and faced her. "I know.... I had fun today too, and I'm glad you are who you are. I wouldn't want it any other way."

"Mmm.... Then stop calling me Tukta."

"I don't," I protested.

She gave me a reproachful look, her eyes luminous and sad. "You're not even aware that you're doing it, are you?"

Was I? Oh Mother, was I confusing her with my daughter in the physical world as well as in my mind? "I'm sorry, Sleek, I didn't realize I'd been doing that. Do I do it often?"

She made a noncommittal sound which I took to be acceptance of my apology. "Not often, but sometimes – like today – you forget." She shrugged, looked away, and brushed her hand across a feathery tree branch. We'd chopped off the dyed blue parts of her hair some time back, and now soft brown waves hung down past her shoulders. Up ahead, one of the children called to her at that point, and she raced down the trail to catch up with the others.

I kept walking at a slower pace, thinking. I hadn't realized I'd been doing that. Her gentle rebuke caused me to question my own insecurities. It wasn't fair to Sleek if I was indeed trying to mold her into another's image for my own comfort. Why did I continue to cling to the past? Why couldn't I go on with my life – what was I afraid of? I will have to guard my tongue and my thoughts more carefully in future. I must go see Granny Night Wind; maybe she can guide me through this difficult time.

*Frost Moon, sun-turning 15*

It's getting very cold at night now. We arrived back in the village by the lake yesterday afternoon, our pack beasts heavy-laden from the annual hunt. Soon we will hold the last harvest feast. Everyone is excited. After the festivities we will pack up everything important and leave this exposed, stormy beach. When the blue snows pile up outside, we will be safe in our warm underground lodges up the sheltered valley in the hills.

*Frost Moon, sun-turning 28*

I walked to the Mother Stone today to say farewell till our return in Awakening Moon. The seasons have turned and the dark time is upon us once again. In the shadows along the path specters of other races that once lived here too materialized, and watched me with solemn red eyes. Their voices whispered to me on the cool wind, but I couldn't understand their alien speech. What happened to those born to this world? Our Benefactors don't know....

Along with my blood, I poured out to the Mother my hopes and fears for the future. I hope She heard and will bless us. We are all that is left of humanity now. Can we survive? Or will this land one day absorb us back into itself as she has others who have walked these hills? Such thoughts

deepened the chill in my bones, and I hurried back to the warmth of my family's compound. I want us all to live, and be happy.

The last harvest feast is tonight after the communal prayers. I'm resolved to set aside my dark mood and be happy. My pregnant daughter and others from across the lake are coming for the festivities. Oh, it will be good to see her. I mustn't waste any more time, Sun Fire needs help with the baking.

☪

Cold Moon, sun-turning 1

I am a little achy this morning – too much good food, dancing – and definitely too much uiskajac. What a wonderful party. I danced till I thought my feet would fall off. It was too cold for lovemaking under the stars, but the sweet pleasure under our warm blankets was just as good. I want to laze around in bed today, but the village will begin the packing for our move. And I have to say farewell to our departing guests. My daughter looks radiant – she is due in the Awakening Moon. What a good omen. I will miss her though. I wish I could be with her during this time. I hope she waits till I can come to her to have the child.

Sleek has disappeared again – just when I need her the most....

☪

Cold Moon, sun-turning 12

During the good weather, we were able to distract our charges with work and games played down on the beach in the evenings. Now that the blue snows are here, some of them have started whining about computer games and videos again. I talked to Tomcowan today about a theatre project. Maybe that will help keep them amused.

☪

Cold Moon, sun-turning 14

As a compromise, Dra'hada is willing to send for some of the high tech equipment now in storage. If our new charges agree to study in our school, they will be allowed limited time on the equipment for entertainment pursuits. Twice and the others are dubious about the schooling part,

but Dra'hada was firm with them. The Long Sleep Moons are a strain on everyone; I hope the play practices and Dra'hada's machines will help it pass in tranquility.

☪

Ice Moon, sun-turning 2

We are teaching those who wish to learn the discipline of "The Communion." In the long nights when the snows are heavy on the land above, we journey underground, to the warm cave of the Mother. There we lie together on the floor of a large chamber, our limbs touching, and we slide into the sweet reverie that is the Deep Communion with Tallav'Wahir. We leave our bodies in the warm darkness and allow our spirits to swim upon the Great Starry River. We journey to other worlds and visit with friends light years away. None of our charges can travel so far, but for those who are willing to try, we have hope that someday they will master the technique well enough to join us.

☪

Ice Moon, sun-turning 7

Tomcowan's play was a success. It was written and performed by our charges. And I am so proud; my new daughter is such a good actress. She seemed to shine like a jewel when we offered her our praise. Our fosterlings told us the story of their lives in the lost city of Vancouver. Parts were funny, and some things were sad. Much of it I didn't understand, but in spite of that, the performance was very moving. The elders will tell stories of our own history tonight. I hope our fosterlings will like them. There is so much for us to share and weave together if we are to become one people.

☪

Ice Moon, sun-turning 15

In the aftermath of Tomcowan's play, an air of desolation has settled over our charges. It is very disheartening. The long, gloomy days indoors have given the memories of their lost home an unexpected poignancy. More fights today.

Just now I found Jimalbot staring moodily into the flames of our fire. I sat beside him and asked why he and the others were still grieving for such a horrible place.

He looked at me with his sorrowful blue eyes and said, "It wasn't all bad there. Qwalshina. My wife and I lived comfortably in a nice house by the ocean. Along with the bad, there was a lot of good too. Art, music, fine literature, advances in science and medicine – we had a lot to be proud of. As hard as it was for people like Sleek and Twice back home I think they miss it as much as I do."

"Yes, I'm sure they do, and I can't understand that either."

He shrugged. "Home is home, no matter how bad it is, and you can't help caring when it's gone – if it's gone."

If it's gone? I didn't want to get bogged down in that conversation again, so I began a new topic. "Caring? Why didn't the people of your city care enough to protect suffering children who starved on your city streets? Why didn't they care enough to honour the Earth Mother and not destroy her gifts to you? Can you honestly say that life here has been so terrible that you would wish to go back?"

He was silent for a long time, just staring into the flames. Finally he tossed another stick onto the fire and shook his head. "I don't know, Qwalshina."

"Don't know?" I was confused and upset myself by then so I left him. Vancouver sounded like such a terrible place. How could they possibly miss it and want to return?

✧

Ice Moon, sun-turning 19

The rumours about Earth have surfaced again, and this time I'm sure Dra'hada has heard them. Perhaps the play wasn't such a good idea after all. Everyone is getting tired of the cold and the confinement. The books have been read and reread, lessons and amusements are boring, and food and drink grow stale. Tempers are short. I try to sleep as much as I can. For us, this time is a natural phenomenon to be endured. For our charges, it is a torment beyond belief. Our warm dark homes anger or depress them. The snow is too deep, not the right colour, too cold – the litany is endless. I'm going back to my bed.

✧

Sun-Comes-Back Moon, sun-turning 7

When I lie upon my communion mat and close my eyes, I can feel the deep stirring in the land, and my body responds to it gladly. The sap is rising, and the snow melting, and my daughter tells me her belly is nearly bursting. The sun is warm on my back when I collect the overflowing buckets of sap from the trees in the sugar bush. And, wonder of wonders, our Sun Fire is pregnant again. Tree is taking a lot of teasing for starting a new family at his age, but we are so pleased. This time the baby – all the babies – will be healthy. I just know it.

✧

Sun-Comes-Back Moon, sun-turning 28

One of the great ships from the Homeworld is coming. Dra'hada is ecstatic. Poor creature – this past year–turning has been so hard on him. What with all the villagers' and fosterlings' complaints to sort out and the unease of the Mother's Spirit Guardians to placate, it is no wonder that our Benefactor has aged visibly. It will do all of us good to have Benefactors from the Homeworld here for the renewal ceremonies. Perhaps they will be able to put those rumors about Earth's survival to rest once and for all.

The ship will be here by the time the snow is gone, so Dra'hada tells me. I wonder if they will bring a new mate for our dear teacher? It will be a great celebration; other villages are coming to join us. Everyone is excited, even our young fosterlings.

✧

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 4

We are back in our village by the lake again. Our compound survived the storm season without needing many repairs. That is good because the ship will be here soon and there is so much to do before our guests arrive.

During all the confusion, Sleek went missing again. When she crept back into the compound just before the evening meal, I was so angry I shouted at her. She of course shouted right back. Why, oh why, does she continue to be so irresponsible! I'm trying not to compare her to Tukta, but it is so hard.

✧

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 10

My heart is on the ground. The village is overflowing with guests. I'm trying very hard not to let my personal tragedy spoil the festive mood for others. My daughter's baby was born deformed and was – oh, I can't even write down the words.... The tragedy happened the night before last, her husband's aunt told me when she arrived today. Tears blur my vision as I try to write this. Oh, Mother, how could this happen – again.

Tukta, my dear sweet Tukta! I want desperately to go to her, take her in my arms, and kiss away the pain. But I can't, not until after the ceremonies are over. What am I thinking of? She isn't a child anymore. I can't make this terrible hurt go away by my presence. And I have obligations to the People that take precedence over personal concerns. I must stay; I must be here to greet our Benefactors when the ship comes tomorrow. The Renewal Ceremony at the Mother Stone this year will be very important.

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 11

When I looked into the faces of our guests from the Homeworld today, I felt such a rage building up inside me that I could hardly breathe at times. Granny Night Wind sensed my disharmony, and made me drink a potion to settle my spirit. This new emotion I feel frightens me. What if we are living a lie – what if the people from Earth are right? I hate them! Why did they have to come here? Maybe they should have been left to die on their god-cursed world!

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 12

Our compound is quiet tonight; we took in no guests for the feasting. I can hear the sounds of merriment going on around us as I write this. The little ones don't understand. Sun Fire has taken them to the fire down on the beach. I am glad. My old man Tree is resting in the bedroom behind me. His nearness right now is a comfort.

To my surprise, Sleek hasn't joined the revelers. She was standing in the doorway when I looked up from my pad. I wanted to say something encouraging to her, but I feel too dead inside to make the effort.

She watched me for a long moment in silence, then said, "I-I'm sorry

about your daughter, Qwalshina. Sun Fire said something went wrong and the baby's dead. Is that true – or did the damned lizards kill it?"

Her unspoken thought seemed to ring in my mind: filthy lizards, I told you they couldn't be trusted. Suddenly I felt my anger leap up like oil poured onto flames. I hated her at that moment with all my heart, and maybe she felt it, because she staggered backward and grabbed the doorpost for support. Why was she here – and healthy? Why had she, an unfit mother, had a healthy baby, when my dear sweet Tukta could not? Tukta loves her new husband, I thought, and now our Benefactors will probably want her to choose a new mate – it is unfair.

When I gave no answer and only glared at her, Sleek's expression crumpled, and she disappeared back into the night.

After she was gone, Tree came out of the bedroom. He didn't reproach me for my cruelty; he only took me in his arms and led me to our bed. I lay down beside him, buried my face in the warmth of his chest, and cried.

When I could control myself enough to speak, I said, "I'm so ashamed. The one time she tried to comfort someone else, I was unkind to her. Like a mean-spirited hag I pushed her away. Why was I so cruel to her, Tree? I don't understand her or myself anymore."

"Hush now, my flower," Tree soothed. "You are tired, and grieving. People say and do things that they don't truly mean at such a time. I know you care about her, and she does too. I will speak to her tomorrow. Go to sleep, my heart, all will be well!"

I drifted into sleep, as he suggested, but deep in my heart I knew all would not be well – not for a long time – and maybe not ever again.

Awakening Moon, sun-turning 13

The most terrible thing has happened. Oh, it is so terrible I can hardly think of it without bursting into tears all over again. Sleek is dead, and so are ten others, one of them a native man from Cold Spring village. Tallav'Wahir, forgive me. I saw her sneaking out of our compound, and I did nothing to stop her. Did I drive her into joining those foolish people with my hard looks and resentment? Was I just another mother who failed her?

It was late in the afternoon when it happened. Most of our visiting Benefactors and other guests had taken air cars down the lake to visit Black Rock Village. I was just helping Sun Fire settle the children for their naps when a loud rumbling whine brought me and most of the adults still in the village racing to the shore. The great ship resting on the sand was making

terrible noises, and trembling violently by the time we arrived. From within its opened hatchway we heard screaming – human screaming.

We looked at one another, our eyes round as soup bowls. Then all the noise and trembling stopped as abruptly as it started. We waited, but nothing further happened. Finally Granny Night Wind and I walked to the stairway and called out to the crew left on duty inside. At first no one answered, but when the old woman started up the stairs, a weak voice from within warned her to come no closer. We exchanged glances, and then I said to the people in the ship, "Honoured Benefactors, is something wrong? Can we help you?"

"No, you can't help. Come no closer – it may kill you too if you try to enter."

Kill us? I was taller than Granny; I peered into the dimness of the open hatch. My nose caught the metallic scent of blood before I saw it. There on the floor, blood – red blood. The benefactor's blood is brown. I shivered, a claw of fear tearing at my heart. What had happened in there? Oh, Mother, where was Sleek? I turned back to Granny. Had she seen the blood on the floor too? I stepped down off the stair, my mind in shock. People called to me, but I couldn't answer. I heard the sound of the air cars returning, and then people running past me. I swayed and would have fallen, but suddenly Tree's arms were around me, hugging me to his chest. "Qwalshina, what's happened?"

He was warm and solid, smelling of budding leaves and smoky leather. Against his chest, I shook my head. No words could get past the aching lump in my throat.

The visiting Benefactors rushed into their ship, and soon after Dra'hada appeared and told us to return to our homes. He wouldn't answer the shouted questions put to him. "Everything is in order now. No need to fear. Go back to your homes. Tonight at the Big Sing I will tell you all that has happened."

Granny Night Wind added her own urging to the gathered people and soon most drifted away. I stayed; I refused to let Tree and Sun Fire lead me away. When Dra'hada came over to us, I clutched his scaly hand and begged, "Please, honoured teacher, tell me what has happened."

Dra'hada's headcrest drooped, and he patted my hand. "Go home, Qwalshina. You can't do anything to help here. Go home with your family."

"Damn you, I'm not a child. Tell me what's happened. Is Sleek in there?" I heard Tree and Sun Fire's gasps of surprise at my disrespect, but I was too frightened to care. I had to know.

For just a moment Dra'hada's headcrest flattened and I saw the gleam of long teeth under his parted black lips. I shuddered, but stood my ground.

I had to know. Then he let go his own anger and looked at me solemnly. "I never assumed you were a child, Qwalshina; I am sorry if you think that. All right, I will tell you. Yes, Sleek is in there – dead."

I continued to stare at him, willing him to finish it. He sighed and finally continued, "It seems that the rumour about Earth still existing took root stronger in other villages than it did here. All during the harsh weather this cancer has been growing among the new refugees. A man named Carljameson wanted to take our ship and go back to Earth. There were others who helped him try. What they didn't know, or couldn't understand, is that the great ships from the Homeworld are sentient beings. They aren't shells of dead metal like the machines of Earth. When our crew was threatened, the ship itself responded by killing the intruders in a most painful way."

Dra'hada refused to tell me the details. He could sense how upset I was, and told Tree to take me home. Later I learned Carljameson and his war band forced their way on board the ship with the help of the man from Cold Spring. They stole weapons from somewhere and injured one of our Benefactors during the struggle. With so many new people here, and everybody celebrating, no one took note of the conspirators' odd behaviour.

Ah, why didn't I go after Sleek when I saw her leave? I was selfish and careless. I was grieving for my daughter, and I was so tired of fighting with Sleek. I blame myself in part for her tragic death. Could I have done more to make her a part of our family?



Awakening Moon, sun-turning 14

There is a great council being held among our Benefactors aboard the ship. Communications with the Homeworld have been established. Because of the man from Cold Spring's involvement, not only the newcomers' fate, but also our own, will depend on the Council's decision.

Some of our Benefactors claim that we are a genetically flawed species. We should all be eliminated, and this world reseeded with another more stable species. Others like our dear Dra'hada counsel that that is too harsh a decision. We have lived here the required seven generations and more. We are not to blame for the assault. They counsel that those of us who have bred true to the Ancient Way should be allowed to continue on either as we are, or interbred with another compatible species to improve our bloodlines.

They are meeting on the ship now.

Around me, the land continues to sing its ancient song of renewal. The Mother will not intercede for us with our Benefactors. She is wise, but in the passionless way of ancient stone. In the darkness last night the people met in the village square to sing the Awakening songs, as we have always done. Tears in my eyes, I lifted up my voice with the rest. I was afraid – we all were. Just before dawn I climbed to the Mother Stone.

What will the day bring to my people, life or termination? I lean my head against the stone's solid bulk and breathe in the smells of new growth and the thawing mud in the lake. Blood. The old people say it is the carrier of ancestral memory and our future's promise. The stone is cold. I'm shivering as I open a wound on my forearm and make my offering. My blood is red, an alien colour on this world.

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Trade Winds

devorah major

1.

"We are always home," Enrishi said. Her instructions were very precise on repeating the welcoming three times.

"We have much to learn from one another," Jonah smiled as he stretched out his hand, a white glove encasing the lined red-brown fingers she had seen in the transmission. His face, though, was close to the same colour, a red-brown not unlike the asteroid rock her grandfather had given her, but his skin shone in a way that was not evident in the video feeds, and now she could also see thatched fine lines at the edges of his eyes and mouth, similar to those on her sacred meditation stone.

Enrishi wore a thin cloth that fell down her soft stretched frame. She was just under two metres tall, with a soft green skin that reminded him of banana leaves. As she stepped out of the ship's final inspection chamber, she threw back the shimmering cloth that covered her entire face. She shook her