

Chapter 10: Transformation

Duan and I had started our mapping and inventory work for the Luminar Record. We both felt suited to our choices – I loved moving independently on the surface, breathing in everything, priceless everywhere within details. Duan loved the broad, analytical discovery – compelled to understand Luminar as a whole.

I was often so lost in my work that interruptions from the Net struck me as just another new phenomenon, and I would turn my head to see what was responsible for the strange new noise. Once it took Duan several attempts to get my attention, finally getting through with the words, *Mother ship Netsearch Jama, mother ship Netsearch Jama.*

We shared a form of laughter on the Net before addressing his message. I forced myself to shift from humor, Netwise. *Tell me, Duan!*

His response was warm for the Net. *I wanted to tell you that our flex-channel scanner is established in low polar. The first burst came in this morning. We should have enough information to choose some exploration sites by tomorrow. And Jama, I already know that some of the conclusions from the Mother Ship surveys were premature – specifically regarding temperature fluctuations and land mass movements. Once the orbits start overlapping, we will be able to resolve some mysteries about Luminar. Waiting for the data is difficult.*

Duan must have Netted with severe restraint. These were important results.

But my body interrupted budding curiosity with a warning, and the idea came into consciousness for me to sit down, so I turned away from the hill I had been mapping, and sat down, somewhat unbalanced. It felt unusually good to rest, and I sent a status query to my implant for an explanation.

A minor pain struck just when the results returned, but remembering about Duan's message pulled me back to him before taking a look. Netwise, I said, *That is really good news.*

I did an internal page turn to look at the status results.

Surprised, I continued the Net message to Duan. *I just had some sharp internal pain, and my hormone balance is reading abnormal. Are you close to our dwelling. Can I meet you there?*

The Net conveyed a change in mood before Duan replied. *I'm heading there now, but should I come to you?*

I was thinking it, and I sensed Duan was too. *Had something gone wrong after conception?*

The automaton working next to me responded to my silent request, and we started home together. I still felt spatial imbalance, and walked with a hand on the 'ton's hard body.

Duan, I am walking with a 'ton and will meet you at our shelter vault.

Duan's reply was concerned, simple. *I will be there.*

I arrived at the vault drained, but the pain was gone. My implant had confirmed my fears: *Our child had aborted development.*

I was stunned. Sitting with Duan in our null-gee, I simply felt blank. No tears, no thoughts. As if I was without place, purpose or passion.

Duan and I held each other in silence until the sun set.

We started asking Netwise questions. Conception caused significant hormone changes that my long dormant reproductive system could not balance. The implant was unable to protect our child from the fluctuations, and development aborted.

Was it foolish for me to expect this body to create life after so many silent years? Would it ever be capable without significant risk?

Duan and I put our survey work on hold for a few days so we could answer these questions and absorb the disappointment.

It was three days before I found renewed interest in the Luminar survey. It returned after Duan showed me something I could never have expected.

Mid morning on the third day, he gave me a container with something hidden inside and a big childlike smile that softened my countenance.

From the container, I lifted the vial that held the leaf-eating creature Duan had found several days before. It was no longer visible, and I felt concerned until I saw a lifeless structure attached to one of the leaves. At one end some movement became evident, so I pulled closer to watch.

Emerging from the dark shell was a new creature, and as it emerged, appendages unfolded which we realized could be used for flight.

Luminar had created a simple leaf eater that could transform itself into another creature that was capable of flight. As we watched, the flyer stretched colorful wings, expanding into something entirely different from its original indelicate form.

Life transforming unpredictably from apparent death.

We carried it outside and watched, awestruck, as it flew away.

I looked at Duan, and silently we shared a thought of hope – for us, and for this planet.

What other miracles is Luminar gestating?