

CHAPTER 1

“Look—she’s wakin’ up!”

“Oh my goodness—could this be happening at last? Missy, sweetheart, are you really finally wakin’ up?”

“Darlin’, can you hear me?”

“Missy Girl, you comin’ back to us?”

OMG—oh my galaxy...what a strange-sounding language! It seems to be all k’s intermingled with whooshes of ssssss and sshhhhhh sounds! Is that English? I’ve studied English for eons, but it seems so different up close.

“She moved her hand again!”

“She’s movin’ her eyelids! Oh, Missy, are you actually wakin’ up?”

The woman in the bed slowly opens her eyes and then quickly shuts them against the bright lights.

“Missy!” An older female human be-thing’s voice cracks.

She opens her eyes again. The three people standing around and over her are blurry against the overhead light and the glare from the window. She counts two male humans and the female. She quickly shuts her eyes again.

Oh, that hurts! It hurts here.

“Missy, honey, can you hear me? Are you comin’ back to us?” The older woman’s voice breaks into a strange wailing noise.

“Darling girl, we thought we lost you,” the older man says as her eyes flutter open again. “But yer comin’ back to us, aren’t you?”

“Missy,” the younger man says, his voice breaking.

“Get the doctor!” shouts the older man.

The younger man rushes out of the room.

Her eyes slowly open even as she squints, trying to adjust to the bright light. *Wow, that starshine is radiant—even more than the one at home!*

A voice booms over the loudspeaker outside the room: “Dr. Livingston, please go to room two-fourteen. Dr. Livingston, please go to room two-fourteen, stat.” Those words are immediately followed by, “Code blue, room two-eleven. Code blue, room two-eleven.”

Ohhhhhhhh—what a strange place this is! Loud noises, awful smells, strange beings looking at me.

The woman struggles to lift her hand just a few inches off the bed, clearly shocked to see it. *Oh. Right. I’m one of those strange beings now.*

A woman in a white coat hurries into the room and looks over the machines next to the bed and hooked up to the woman in the bed.

“Yer a lucky lady,” states the woman in white. “We almost lost you. In fact, we did lose you. But welcome back.” She looks at the small family gathered in the room. “Yer one lucky bunch.”

“Thanks, Dr. Livingston,” the older man says through glistening eyes, “fer everything you’ve done.”

Doctor. Doctor. There are so many definitions in that word. Why can’t I remember anything? Where’d all my training go?

The woman in the bed just stares up at the group staring down at her.

This is odd. Do humans just stare at each other?

“Missy, how are you feelin’?”

She doesn’t respond; she just looks at the younger man who asked the question. He looks at the doctor, who then addresses her. “Missy, can you say something to us? Anything at all?”

The woman starts to speak, but then stops. The sensations in her throat feel very unusual.

“Well, you’ve had a very, very long journey back here,” the doctor says, reassuringly.

You’re not kidding.

“We should give you some time,” the doctor continues. She ushers the family out of the room.

When can I go back in the other direction?

The young woman can still see and overhear them talking in the hallway.

"Is she gonna be okay?" the older woman asks.

"How's her mind gonna be?" the older man asks.

"Well, we don't know yet," the doctor responds. "We have to give it some time. That was a horrific accident, and we're just lucky she didn't die. In fact, she did die for a minute there, as you well know. I'm amazed she came back. She certainly wanted to be here, that's for sure."

The older woman holds her hand to her mouth, pushing back a gasp. The older man puts his arm around her.

The group starts to walk back into the room.

"Don't push her," the doctor emphasizes. "Give her lots of time and space—she needs that."

Time and space. Oh, you have no idea.

"Missy," the young man says, his eyes looking strangely wet, like the older man's and woman's had been, "we've been with you the whole time you was here."

Isn't it supposed to be were here?

"One of us was always with you, takin' turns, the whole three months."

"Where am I?" she asks.

The group of three, obviously ecstatic that she can talk but dismayed by her question, turns to the doctor, who's still standing by the doorway, writing notes. She rushes in.

"Missy, yer in a hospital room. You had a terrible accident a few months ago, and we thought we lost you at one point. But yer a tough survivor and fought yer way back here."

That's truer than you know.

"Do you know yer name?"

The woman thinks for a minute and then shakes her head.

The young man takes her hand. "Yer Missy. Yer my Missy Miss."

She looks at him as if trying to recollect where in the world she would know him from. After a minute or so, she shuts her eyes.

"Perhaps we should just let her sleep some more," the doctor tells them. "That's when most of the body's heal-ing takes place." She ushers them out of the room again. "Amnesia can be a strange, strange thing," the doctor starts to say. "The brain—" But she shuts the door and the voices are muffled.

Ohhhhhhh, I have a feeling I'm not in the Andromeda galaxy anymore.



She awakens to find the fabric by her bed had been pulled back, and there's an old female human be-thing in the bed next to hers.

"Nurse, how much longer 'til I can leave?" the elder asks.

"Oh, any day now. We just want to make sure yer up to snuff." The nurse checks the machines next to the old humanoid, but when she sees that the younger woman is awake—and staring—she smiles and then gently pulls the fabric back to block her view.

Snuff?



Later that night, the woman opens her eyes again to find the younger man in the chair by the bed. His eyes are shut while very strange noises come from his open mouth as he breathes.

His light hair—*that's what they refer to as hair, right?*—frames his face, while more light hair surrounds his mouth and covers his chin.

He's definitely quite nice to look at—for a humanoid. Well, I guess that's what I am now, too.

She looks around the room. *Where are all the spectacular colors of Earth?* The only splash of color is from the beautiful flowers that maybe the man had brought with him. The rest of the room seems to be white on gray on white on gray. The machines are at least shiny with flashing lights and have fun, familiar beeping sounds. Everything else is white. And gray. And some more white over there. With more gray.

The star isn't shining into the room—the planet must've turned away from it as it does—but she remembers a quick glimpse of the outside as the star was setting and just seeing more variations of white on gray on white on gray outside, too. Oh, perhaps the celestial ceiling was blue. And the star setting had cast glorious pinks and oranges on the white, fluffy gatherings of crystalized droplets. *What are those called? Oh, that's right...clouds. Oh my universe—what happened to all the knowledge I gained after studying for so long?*

She stares at her hands—front and back, front and back. She slowly lifts her arm and moves it back and forth in front of her, as if she's pushing it through...*Oh, what's that interesting word Earthbeings might call it? Oh, right...sludge.* “Oh! No wonder you beings are so grumpy!” she says aloud, to her own surprise.

The young man startles awake. “Missy? You talkin’ to me?”

Missy starts to speak again but then touches her throat. “Very...dry.”

He grabs the cup on her bedside table, but it's empty. “I'll go get you some water.”

As soon he leaves, Missy addresses the air. “Is anyone there?” She pauses for a few seconds. “Can anyone hear me? Something went terribly wrong!”

“I'm here,” comes the old woman's voice from the other side of the curtain.

“Missy, you calling fer me?” the man asks as he returns to the room.

“Who are you?” she asks.

He sets the water down and takes her hand, a strange wetness welling in his eyes. “My name's Matt. I'm yer husband.”

He holds the cup to her lips and, when she seems to not quite know what to do next, he gently pours a little bit of water into her mouth. The cool liquid delights her tongue.

That is called a tongue, right?

After a moment of difficulty with her first time swallow-ing, she relaxes back on to her pillow. *Ohhhhhhhhh!* She feels the water slowly slipping down the back of her throat and then down into this body of hers like a living being itself. Cool meeting warmth, wet meeting dry, slip-ping down, down....

Could anything else in all the universes feel so heavenly? Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh.

“Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

“It's like you've never had a sip of water before.”

Oh, you have no idea.

Matt lets out another strange noise.

That must be a laugh. But his eyes didn't laugh.

“Are you feeling good?” she asks. *That's not the right way to ask that question. Let's see, what was it?* “Are you okay?”

“Yes, Missy, I'm great, now that yer back.”

His eyes don't match the words he's saying. Plus, what a strange accent he has.

"Why do you talk so funny?" she asks.

"I don't talk funny."

"Your name is Matt?"

"Yes. Do you remember me at all?"

She looks at him as if she's trying to remember his face. *You seem very kind but you are not who my project was supposed to be with.* "You're my husband, you said?"

"Yes, darlin', I am."

She thinks for a few seconds. "What's a husband?"

Matt's face falls.



After he leaves, she calls out, "Can I please come home?"

A nurse who'd been just down the hall sticks her head in the door. "We'll get you home just as soon as we can."

"Thank you," Missy says. The nurse leaves. Missy addresses the air over her bed with a much quieter voice. "Right now? Please?"

The old woman in the bed on the other side of the curtain responds, "Make that a double. I'd like to go now, too, please!"

Please? With starlight on top?