

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

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1. Introduction

“Trepidation,” he thought to himself, somewhat triumphantly.

Then, another part of his brain added, “No, that’s not it, either. Pretty close, tho’.”

He had already tried “hesitation,” “great foreboding,” “heavy-heartedness,” and even “perspicacity,” whatever that meant, as well as great many other expressions, to describe precisely the frame of mind, emotion, sensation, or whatever, in which he found himself as he carried himself, or traveled, or trekked, or trudged along, or mindlessly walked, or distractedly journeyed, toward Room 714. He knew that, if someone else had been describing him—say if he had been a character in a novel—this would be entirely appropriate: “Samuel M_, Psy.D., Licensed Psychologist, Full Professor at the University of _, age 51, carried himself toward Room 714 with great trepidation.” That would have been just fine. Yet, it strangely failed to capture the exact nature of Sam’s state of being.

For one, there was the fact that Sam was not a typical doctor who would be trekking toward Room 714 at this fine psychiatric institution on a day like this. Nothing wrong with the day itself... just that Sam was not a psychiatrist, and the patient who may or may not be expecting him with or without great trepidation in Room 714 clearly needed a psychiatrist, or perhaps a neurologist, not a psychologist, if she indeed needed anyone. And Sam was one of those psychologists who had not seen a real “patient” for over two decades, having mainly dealt with “subjects” in carefully controlled experimental settings, flanked by his graduate students and silent computers and one-way mirrors. Even if someone wanted one of those psychologists to see this particular patient, Sam’s field of expertise was nowhere near what anyone would consider to be “applicable” or “appropriate” or even “relevant in any way.”

And, yet, here he was, trekking.

For another, there was the fact that he was here, or allowed to be here, or asked to be here, mainly because all the people who would be interested in this patient, or helpful or insightful or relevant in any way, had all lost interest. They hadn’t given up, exactly. They had simply lost that sense of urgency that propels experts to generate views and theories and suggestions and even

jealousy... or whatever it was that made them try to get involved in an interesting case.

Not that this was not an interesting case. Oh, this was *very* interesting, indeed... and yet they'd all lost interest, and here was Sam, permitted to get involved because it really did not matter to anyone any more in any way.

Christa P_, age 10, white, Protestant, of mainly Irish and Sephardic descent, younger of two children, went missing one summer night in 1992, at a campsite in Texas where her family was staying. No witnesses, no evidence of foul play, no evidence of a run-away or suicide or family strife. No signs before or after. The authorities put some sincere effort into the search, but this was before the age of celebrity missing persons. They not so helpfully pointed out that she might have simply slid off a cliff into a river, and that her body would be found some day, etc., and the family was devastated and furious, but then they became subdued and reconciled to the facts after a while.

Only, two years later, a serial child molester was found with what appeared to be pieces of Christa's clothing, and found to have been at the camp site the night of Christa's disappearance. He confessed to Christa's murder, then pleaded "not guilty," was found guilty, and was executed about ten years after Christa's disappearance. Christa's parents, by now divorced from each other, hoped to get that mythical sense of closure that they never got from the initial cycle of investigation, but could not, and died almost literally of broken hearts within two months of each other, in two different states.

And then, almost exactly forty years after her disappearance, Christa materialized, it seemed, on someone's back yard, stark naked and unconscious, and, it was assumed, with absolutely no memory of the past forty years. Routine genetic scan confirmed her identity, and she had resided in this hospital ever since. That was almost a year ago.

Sam had known her as a child. Bright kid; one of those people you would wonder whatever happened to them since they were so amazing as a kid, except that, oh, right, they're dead. Sam was in the same kindergarten and elementary school classes with her all the way until she disappeared. This, though, no one but Sam knew about. Sam never had a good moment to bring it up during any of the conversations he had had about Christa, and it would have been silly now to bring it up, especially given that no one would care. This, of course, all of this, added to his "trepidation."

The chain of events that lead to Sam's arrival at the door to Room 714 was rather convoluted and unexpected and unimportant. Still, one of the few legitimate factors—of course, this was just a pathetic excuse—was the fact that Sam had dabbled in researching the process by which language acquisition is affected by various psychological factors. One of the many interesting facts about Christa's condition was that at the time of her reappearance she basically had the vocabulary of a ten-year-old, although a very smart and advanced one.

The other aspect of Christa's condition that in fact prompted him to visit her at all was her insistence that she had not lost any memory, that she was not hallucinating or making things up. Being an intelligent, mature person with what appeared to be worldly wisdom acquired through years of life experience, she was also aware that no one would believe a word of what she said about the past forty years of her life.

Sam knocked on the door; Christa mumbled assent. He opened the door.

"So, you are the doctor who wanted to see me." Sam could not place the accent of her very blunt, almost rude, greeting. Very familiar, and, yet, very, very odd. Sam had been told that she had lost most of the strange accent she had when she first reappeared, and now she spoke almost normal English. Still, her voice felt a bit odd.

"Yes, my name is Sam M_. Please call me Sam."

"Well, Dr. Sam, what can I do for you?" Her voice was dignified. She did not remember Sam, it appeared. Apparently, only fragments of her early childhood memories remain—all verified to that reasonable degree which accounts for memory losses typical of a healthy almost-middle-aged woman.

"I would like to ask you some questions."

"Of course."

"And I would like to hear your story."

"Hmmm?"

"Your story... where you've been... all these years."

"What, are you going to try to cure me, too?" She did not emphasize the word "cure" in a way that meant that she was being sarcastic. The unexpected lack of sarcasm ironically startled Sam.

“Ummm...”

“It’s all right... you can try, but I say you can’t.”

“Well, ... would you like me to ‘cure’ you?” Sam held up his fingers around the word “cure.” Christa didn’t notice.

“If you can, or if you want to try, you can try. I don’t see the point of stopping you, really.”

“...”

“The thing is, I’ve been back here for a few months now... and I watch TV, read the computer... I’m catching up. I can just pretend I’ve lost my memory, and it’s gone for good, and just get on with my life, and no one would really mind.”

“...”

“My... nephew... is going to get me out some time soon. Apparently he’s the only family I’ve got left now. He can’t have me stay with him, but he’s rich and he can put me up in a nice apartment.” The word “nice” did have a sarcastic edge to it. “I’ll be O.K.,” she concluded.

There were more distant relatives, second cousins and such, but most of them still refused to believe that it’s really her. Either she didn’t know this, or didn’t care. Her nephew, whose genetic information had been used to confirm Christa’s identity, didn’t really want to believe it’s her, either, but felt an odd sense of duty to her, like she was the last Romanov or something. He had come to meet her several times.

“Let’s say...” Sam cleared his throat. “No, let’s admit... let me admit to you now that I’m not really a ‘curing’ kind of psychologist. Even if you do need ‘curing,’ I... can’t help you even if you wanted me to.”

“I don’t care what kind of doctor you are. Every day I get some nut trying to tell me which kind of what I need...”

Sam decided to interrupt her, “My point is... exactly... really that let’s just say you don’t need *any* help. You don’t need me for anything.”

Christa was silent, and Sam realized that she had not made a single eye contact with him the whole time today. She had not even turned her head to look in his direction. She was lying motionless on her bed, looking straight up at the ceiling, and did so with a quiet sense of dignity that conveyed pride and demanded respect.

Something told him that this was not something that someone with her kind of memory loss or hallucinations or lies would do. Something told him that she was, nevertheless, not “normal.”

“I just want to hear your story... Please.”

“My story...”

“Yes, you... have been away for forty years. I’d like to know what has happened to you in that time... if you know, that is.”

She sighed deeply, with a great deal more dignity on her breath. “I don't know where I have been... I do know that I’ve been away, and that I've been away for a long, long time. I figured it was more like fifty years, but then I had no way of knowing... as I will tell you why.”

“So... you will tell me?”

“Yes. Because you asked. And,” she finally looked at him and smiled, “because you said ‘please.’”

Over several weeks, Sam visited Christa almost every day. Sabbatical is a very useful thing for engaging in a project totally unrelated to one’s academic field... Sam spent as many hours with Christa as his sparse schedule and Christa’s health permitted. As Christa was in fact in almost perfect health, aside from a mild and persistent case of anemia, they began holding their sessions outside, on the hospital grounds, over meals, even out in town. By the time Christa was discharged and moved into her apartment, most of what Christa had to tell Sam had been told, recorded, and transcribed; any new information consisted of minute details and corrections to sequences of events and such. Since it was clear that Christa was the one doing Sam a favor and not *vice versa*, Sam repaid the favor by helping Christa transition into "normal" life. There was much to catch up on in culture and technology and politics and history, and Christa showed a remarkable ability to blend into this foreign world, with occasional slips that could easily be attributed to middle-agedness or absent-mindedness.

Although Christa tried to keep her account as chronological as possible, many of the events she recounted were from a long, long time ago, from her childhood and such, too long ago to remember clearly, save for a few seminal moments. Sam was impressed by the consistency of the narrative... much too tidy in some ways, and much too muddled in some ways, for the whole bit to be simply made up or imagined or such. If it was indeed fictional, she had already written a whole

book in her head, and struggled to recite it bit by bit, often out of order, with occasional corrections and revisions. The manner of her storytelling was by no means a recitation of the Homeric or Oral Traditions type, or the kind of in-head writing which John Milton was famous for having done. Her manner was entirely consistent with someone trying to tell every detail of one's life story, and entirely inconsistent with someone who was delusional or imaginative or simply deceptive. If she was suffering from a memory loss, it was more accurate to say that her memory had been replaced *in toto* with someone else's memory or fiction. What mattered was that Christa really believed that the memory was real and realistic, albeit sorely unbelievable.

So Sam began to believe her. There was no point in not believing her. And as their relationship came to resemble a genuine friendship—Christa was eventually told, and was not moved at all by, the fact that Sam had known her as a child—Sam found himself proposing to revise her story into a coherent narrative, as it certainly was a fascinating story in its own right. As might have been expected, Christa wanted to revise the stories herself. Christa generally welcomed Sam's suggestions for wording choices and grammar and such. She also read a lot, and the influences of these literary intakes showed in her vocabulary. Still, she kept the stories mostly very much her own.

For a few of years, this project went along fine. Then, suddenly, the quality of the narrative started to decline with each revision. Soon it was discovered that her anemia had been taking a toll on her system, and she had developed a myriad of food allergies, which degenerated into a messy constellation of autoimmune diseases. As Christa's mind faltered away, Sam had to go back a few revisions to retrieve a useable draft, and he submitted it to a number of science fiction presses, none of which were interested.

When Christa finally died, at the age of 57, Sam discovered the reason why her extended family had been reluctant to acknowledge her identity. Unwilling to accept that she had died, her maternal grandparents, who had previously disowned her parents, had established a sizable trust fund, with Christa as the primary beneficiary. When both of the grandparents passed away a little over twenty years after Christa's disappearance and several years after her parents' death, the family decided to distribute the funds to secondary beneficiaries, i.e., themselves. Had she known, Christa might have been able to challenge this decision, subject to intricacies of the laws of various States involved. Christa's nephew was one of the greatest beneficiaries, being the closest kin, and it turned

out that he had decided to spend all his share on Christa's care, without the inconvenience of dredging up the regrettable history. Now that she died, what remained was all his to keep.

The nephew was reluctant to finance the publication of Christa's narrative, so it only circulated electronically among a few of the relatives. They certainly did not want to let it be made available .

Frankly speaking, no one but Sam cared about Christa or her stories. No one cared.

Except perhaps the being for whom, apparently, this was all some kind of a cruel joke.

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2.1 The Arrival

I was staying at this campground with my family. I don't know where it was exactly. We were traveling from one end of the country to the other, staying at friends' houses and campgrounds and motels, visiting all the tourist traps along the way. If you want to know which campground we were staying at when I got lost, you can look it up in the news archives.

Anyway, I got lost that night, coming back from the bathroom. I kept stumbling into other people's camp sites, and I apparently got farther and farther away from ours. I thought I saw a light that looked like our car's dome light, so I decided to take a short cut from one section of the campground to another. I could hear some music, too, that sounded like car radio. It wasn't pitch dark, but I did keep almost tripping over things, until I tripped over for real. I fell on to something wet and sticky and gross, and by the time I got up and wiped the stuff off on a tree trunk, the light was gone, and I could not remember which way I was walking. I tried to keep walking in the direction I was heading, and I tripped again, falling on to another puddle of similar sticky, gooey stuff. This time, though, I had fallen in good, and I could not get off that easily. It was like sticky quick sand... or honey, maybe. My head was resting on dry ground, but the rest of my body was trapped on this sticky puddle. So I lifted my head and whimpered for help, then yelled for help. No one came, which was odd because I hadn't walked that far. It didn't get any darker, and I wasn't scared or anything, just really grossed out. In fact, it got lighter much sooner than I thought. It was barely just evening when I got out of the tent to go to the bathroom. And now it was morning. Or something.

And what a strange morning it was! The color of the sky was all wrong. It wasn't orange like the sunrise, or blue like day sky light. It was oddly yellow and green. I once saw a picture of muddy river flowing into a green tropical sea. It was like that.

The color of the sky was not the only odd thing. The ground was not brown or brickly or anything. It was almost a flat gray, with a hint of purple. The leaves on trees... they were thick with leaves, and they were actually green, but more like it was teal or something. It's hard to say. The color just hit you in a funny angle, like you were watching it on TV on old video tapes. I would have

thought that I had hurt my head and was seeing funny, if everything wasn't shaped so funny, too. All the plants were the wrong shapes. I was already weirded out by the strange plants growing in Texas in the wild, but these were not those plants. The little plants, the grass-like ones, grew in clumps, and their leaves branched out like cactus, but these were regular grassy leaves. The taller plants tended to have flattened-out branches with broad, fleshy, glossy, leaves, also branching out like the grassy leaves. The trees mostly seemed like they were vines twisted together (I later learned that they were not) spiraling up to impossible heights.

Just to keep myself calm, I decided that I was either dreaming, or badly hurt by the fall and was just imagining things. Things looked like they were vaguely tropical, so I thought maybe I was dreaming that I was on a tropical island.

Except for the sticky stuff. The sticky stuff, to my surprise, was actually not so gross, looking in the sunlight. It mostly blended in with the color of the ground, so it was that pleasant flat gray with a hint of purple. It was spread out on the ground like someone had spit or spilled a bucket of paint, splattered like it was art. Its edges were glossy and almost sparkled, which made the outline obvious.

So if this is a dream, I thought, this would be a very funny thing to be dreaming about. And so real. I'd had very real dreams like that, where I got trapped or stuck or something, but this sure felt real.

I don't know why or how I decided to just stay still, but I did. For hours and hours, I thought, then it got dark again. I was a little hungry, but maybe just barely for lunch, so I was surprised and oddly relieved to see that the sun was setting again.

The next morning came, and I was really hungry, and getting to be thirsty. The temperature hadn't changed much all through the day and the night, which confirmed to me that I was not in Texas. Now I was fairly thoroughly persuaded that I was not dreaming or imagining or just sick. I was stuck in some odd-colored world on some odd sticky stuff, and I could not move anything but my head.

It was on the second day that I finally realized something that I should have noticed much, much earlier. I wasn't buried in the sticky stuff, like you get in quick sand. I was just stuck on the stuff on top, like you would on fly paper. I should have been able to wiggle out of my clothes for

the most part, or at least lift my body off. I was fairly well covered in outdoorsy fabric, so much so that I hardly got wet when I stepped into puddles and stuff. I should have been able to wiggle out.

So, it seemed, I was naked. Completely naked. I just never thought to look at my body to check, because I was so comfortable lying on the sticky stuff, because I was so thoroughly stuck on it. This freaked me out. I started to cry, then started to wail and scream. I cried for help. I cried incoherently, hysterically. For a long, long time.

Then the furry creatures came. They were all purplish gray, too, and about the size of raccoons. They, in fact, looked a lot like those monkeys that look like raccoons [lemurs], except they didn't have those big eyes. They came in pairs and threes, hopping like when bunnies are trying to walk. And soon there was a whole bunch of them surrounding me. They just watched and looked at me for a while. Then they began to speak to each other... their voice, I knew, they were really *speaking* to each other, in a low-pitched hum. Looking at each other, pointing at me at times, pointing at the sticky stuff, and at each other. They had two hands and four legs, and they stood on two legs, although they mostly moved on four legs.

I tried to stop my sobbing, but I couldn't. I was just sobbing quietly. I was too freaked out to even get scared. Being naked in some sticky stuff, surrounded by six-legged gray creatures, sobbing... I was not in a good situation.

By the time my sobbing finally died down, the furry creatures were in a serious discussion with one another. They seemed convinced that I was securely stuck in the sticky stuff, so they felt free to stop keeping a close watch on me. Their tone of voice was falling and rising. Some of them even seemed angry; some were amused. (I later learned that I had these expressions backwards.) I thought I might be in big trouble, or perhaps they were just trying to be helpful and were trying to figure out how, so I thought I should at least have an input in the process.

I said, "Help?!"

This startled everyone. Some of them even backed off slowly.

I tried to make my face as plaintive as possible, and said, again, "Help." Then, I added, "Please."

When I said "Please," their composure changed. They started repeating a word to one another, then another heated discussion started up. The word they kept using, I could hear very

clearly, was “hlata,” and it seemed to calm some of them down and excite others whenever someone said it.

So I decided to take a chance, and said, “Hlata. Please. Help, please.” I was trying to say that “help” meant “hlata.”

Discussion heated up even further, and some of them, it seemed, left in disgust. (I was right.)

I tried again, “Hlata, please. Help, please,” this time in a lower voice to match their pitch.

At hearing this, one of the furry creatures, who I figured was the leader, stomped its foot very loudly, yelled something really fast, and the discussion finally stopped. Some more of the creatures left. A couple of the creatures asked it a quick question, and then darted off.

It took some time for those two to return with a small vat of fluid. They tossed the fluid on to me... it was cold, and tingled slightly like soapy, foamy water, then itched a little. I reached to scratch myself... and realized that it had made the sticky stuff not so sticky any more.

When I sat up, the creatures backed off a bit, then one of them approached me with another vat of the same fluid. It motioned to me to toss the fluid onto myself. I did, and used it to wash the rest of the sticky stuff off my body. The creatures gestured like I was doing the right thing. The itching continued for a bit, then stopped. I figured I was allergic to it or something. (They later told me that no one there ever had any side effects from the antidote.)

When I finally managed to stand up—and I had to do it very slowly because I was a bit light-headed—they seemed awful surprised at how tall I was. I was not that tall a girl, but I was certainly taller than a raccoon that had half of its body on the ground on four legs. I slouched a bit so I didn’t tower over them so much, and they began to march, motioning to me. One of the creatures had the clever idea of standing up like me, and following the instructions of the creature I had thought was the leader. It was modeling for me what the leader was asking me to do. So I imitated the creature, and everyone seemed pleased and relaxed.

The leader took me to what I thought was their village. Later I realized that it was an abandoned village, with buildings made of decaying mud bricks. They apparently did not want to reveal their actual village to me, since they did not yet trust me. There was a stream nearby, with honest-to-goodness clear water flowing in it, so I drank some with my hand. Seeing this, they

brought me a little vat like the ones they had earlier, which I could use as a cup. It appeared to be made of some sort of ceramic material. (Which it turned out to be.)

They brought me some food. They were a bit uncomfortable doing this. I later realized that this was because these were all things that were freely available in the forest, and so they did not have a system for storing or delivering food. There was always plenty. I tried some of the fruit-like things, and they were bland and dry but O.K. The stuff that tasted bitter, I spat out and rinsed out my mouth like my parents had taught me about poisonous plants. When they saw me do this, they brought some finely ground stuff and sprinkled it on the bitter stuff, and got me to taste it again. It still tasted awful, which seemed to confuse them. Turned out that the ground stuff was like a fancy spice, and much of their economy was based on luxury items like that that allowed them to eat things that they normally would not. These, they stored carefully and transported over great distances. Also turned out that the bland stuff and the bitter stuff actually tasted the same to them.

After having eaten and drunk, I noticed my nakedness again. I had grown up in a “free spirit” family, so I did not mind being naked so much, especially since I was just a kid, but I got a little shy, and tried to gesture to the creatures that I needed something to wear... seeing that they were furry and weren’t wearing anything at all, this was rather tricky to communicate. I finally had a good idea. I found some grassy leaves, tore them into thin strands and clumsily wove them together, which was quite easy, forming a mat. Then I wrapped the mat around my lower body, and I pointed at it, and shrugged my shoulders.

When they saw this, another heated discussion broke out. This time an even larger group of them broke off and left in disgust. The leader creature this time was not leading this discussion. A different leader emerged, and stomped its foot. The leader mumbled something to me, almost apologetic or very, very disappointed, or both, and they all disappeared.

The night came, and they didn’t return for six of their days. I had plenty to drink and eat, so I wasn’t worried; I wove together some more mats, which made a serviceable bed, and I slept well. When I wasn’t looking for food or eating, I made more mats to pass the time. I found that the grassy plants dried very quickly once harvested, and then could be torn into very fine threads, so I started trying to figure out a better way to weave it together, regretting that I had never learned to knit or weave in earnest. (Leaves that are not torn up become brittle and crumbled to dust.) I did manage to make some short, uneven lengths of rope-like strings. Not bad for a little girl lost in a

forest. It's amazing how creative one can be when left alone and quiet.

When they returned, they were carrying a large piece of something that resembled silk, but it was really a kind of leather. It was luxuriously soft, purplish gray, and was large enough for me to make a decent toga. I smiled, which they seemed to accept as gratitude, and they seemed pleased that I was pleased.

I pointed at my handiwork, and gestured them to ask them if they wanted any. Seemed I had to offer them something in return, although I knew they weren't much. They seemed to understand me, and accepted the offer. They took two large mats and three pieces of string. From then on, they exchanged about that much of my stuff for about the same amount of leather.

So began our friendship.

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Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

2.2 The Arrival

Here I write the words, not to glorify the world with words, not to glorify words with the world. Readers beware that words are corrupt and untrue. Yet memories fade and words remain. Truth fades and lies remain. So I write the lies, so may the memories be kept even in corruption.

With these unworthy words, as is our habit, I begin my words. May it be known that these are the words about the Great One, who arrived one day in great mystery, and departed another day in great glory. May it be known that these are lies.

Those of us who are users of words begin all of our words with these words. Those of us who are users of words are also users of memory, so all of us know why we begin our words with these words always. As I say, I here write timed words of the coming and leaving of the Great One, for while many things are known about the Great One, many memories do not agree with one another, so I choose what I use as the best memory. I do not want the readers to think I am using words to make you choose the right between the memories. I am not such a Judge, and we have abandoned all our Judges. I only do this to be true to the swear of all word users, to keep the memories even if it is in lies.

The memories do not tell us when the Great One came. Many word users thought that she came in the oneth year, and this is why we have the years, to count the years since the Great One arrived, and this was as the Great One wished. Some word users then counted that she arrived really on the twoth year before the oneth year, and so now we believe this to be right. Can it be that the Great One was herself wrong about when she arrived?

Most of the memories of the arrival of the Great One are the memories of the Forest Creatures, for most of us did not even know of the Great One's presence until the Pouring, when the Forest Creatures ran out of the Forest to tell us of the words, and of the Great One. Now the Forest Creatures are all gone, and we need to use the memory telling of their memories, and so they are not our memories but theirs, if their memories can be trusted, for they were all word users,

worse because they trusted their words more than their memories.

The Forest Creatures say that the arrival of the Great One had been prophesied. What is a prophesy but a word? A lie? Yet they believed that the Great One had been prophesied to come. We do not believe them, for before the Great One, there were no words, and so there was no prophesy. Yet they believed in the prophesy.

Only, their prophesy did not say whether the Great One would come among the Forest Creatures, or among the Valley Creatures, or among the Field Creatures, or among the Shore Creatures. They only believed that the Great One would come, and that the manner of her coming would show who amongst us all Creatures she should live.

And so she arrived one day among the Forest Creatures. She arrived without fur, so she was not a Forest Creature. She was tall like the Field Creatures, but she had no leather. She arrived neither a Forest Creature nor a Field Creature. The Forest Creatures could not agree among themselves whether she was the Great One or not, for she did not fulfill the prophesy that the manner of her coming would show. She decided to arrive and set herself apart, and so many Forest Creatures left in fear, for fear that she did not come to give but to die. Then she demanded a leather. The Forest Creatures possessed no leather, so again the Forest Creatures could not agree among themselves whether she was the Great One or not, for she did not fulfill the prophesy that the manner of her coming would show. She decided to arrive and set herself apart, and so many Forest Creatures left in disbelief, for fear that she did not come to live but to take. The Forest Creatures that remained were faithful in their belief that she was the Great One, and that she had come to live for the Forest Creatures, and so she was the Great One. They got leather for the Great One, they would not say how, or their memory does not say, for their memory is broken by words, and gave her the leather. The Great One gave them pieces of Blamas leaves in exchange. The Forest Creatures were pleased with these worthless gifts, for they thought these gifts were divine and full of blessing. The fools!

Some of the Forest Creatures who left came to dwell with the Field Creatures. Field Creatures have memory of how she arrived. She was caught in a Forest Creature spit trap. She was without fur and without leather, and she could not take herself off the spit trap. For days and days

she could not speak, and she lay in the spit trap motionless, furless, and leatherless. Yet, she declared herself the Great One, in a great, booming, screeching voice, and demanded to be taken to the sacred temple of the One God. The Forest Creatures gave her the temple as her house, and she drank from the sacred river, and she did not die of sickness, thus proving her divinity. She ate the humble foods, and spat out the special foods in disgust, thus proving her uncreativity. She did not speak like the Forest Creatures, but instead taught them the words. This is the glory and curse which she brought to the Forest Creatures.

When the Forest Creatures released her from the spit trap using the water boiled with 'lala dust, her skin turned red, and she rubbed herself shamelessly until she could hide her red nature again. It was not prophesied that the Great One could change her color, because no Forest Creature could change color, so this confounded the Forest Creatures. When she demanded leather, some thought this was so she could not be seen changing colors again. Those who trusted her deemed this a wise decision. Those who distrusted her left.

Before the Great One's arrival, no one ate the Blamas, and no one used the Blamas, so no one harvested the Blamas and no one traded the Blamas. The Great One chose to bless the Forest Creatures with Blamas leaves, and slept on Blamas blankets, and made leather out of Blamas. This worthless grass became a great pride of the Forest Creatures, and as the words spread, the use of Blamas spread as well. Hlata Blamas, the Blamas grasses that came from the Great One, were worshiped as sacred. Soon the Forest Creatures were harvesting the Blamas grasses as fast as they could, and turning them into leather as the Great One did, covering their bodies with it as if it is leather or fur.

The Forest Creatures began to demand that the Field Creatures give them real leather in exchange for Blamas leather. They always wanted to have leather, but could never afford much of it, as the Forest Creatures produced nothing the Field Creatures could not, except for their fine vattery, and the Field Creatures had as much vattery as they needed, and besides they liked the Shore Creatures' vattery better. Yet the Great One kept demanding real leather, and the Forest Creatures had no way of getting them. The Field Creatures had no use for Blamas leather, for they were weak and rotted easily and fell apart in wet weather, and so would not exchange it for real leather.

So the Forest Creatures decided to make the leather themselves the same way the Field

Creatures made leather, by skinning the Field Creatures that died in their long sleep. The Forest Creatures came in great numbers, sneaking upon the Field Creatures during their long sleep, and skinned them dead or alive, for you do not know which Field Creature is dead until all are awakened from the long sleep.

The Forest Creatures, always fair in trade, left behind as much of their vattery and the Blamas leather as they thought right for the amount of leather they took, and the Field Creatures decided that they would accept this as fair, too, rather than make a fuss.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

3.1 The Plantings

The creatures did not visit me often, maybe once every five to seven days or so. It was just as well since I slept the whole day every three days. I was glad that they mostly left me alone, although I also really wanted to get to know them. I kept making grass things for them, and I was starting to get quite good at getting the fibers to be finer and mats to be more and more like soft blanket rather than just mats, and making the ropes longer and stronger.

I was amused and flattered to find some of them using my grassy things for adorning themselves, some even wearing a mat as a kind of a cloak; the mats were that soft! They were at first a bit hesitant to just take them as my gift of thanks, but, after a while, they began bringing me some more of that leathery fabric, which I just loved, so, as long as they thought it was a fair trade, I thought it was fine.

Once I noticed one creature watching me make a mat really intently, so I showed it how to make one. It is impressive how fast these creatures learned to do things. I just showed it a few steps at a time, and there it was, doing it! Soon there were a bunch of them learning how to do it, and they were doing it back at their houses, and they started bringing and showing me what they made. I was so pleased, I could burst! They had saved me, and I taught them something useful... their stuff was getting better and better, and they were making some seriously soft and warm blankets out of these grasses.

I had made the point of planting the seeds from some of the fruits I liked, and I also made a point of showing them that I was doing it. They looked very dubious at first, like I was wasting food, but they were so surprised when the plants started growing up from the seeds. Once they could see that the plants growing out of the seeds were the very plants that the seeds had come from, they were shocked and speechless.

So, one day, they brought me this foul-smelling piece of mud, which I thought was a piece of poop, and I realized this was the thing that they ground up to make that spice that turns everything into a delicacy. I carefully peeled off the dusty flesh, and, guess what, I found a string of

white seeds inside. So, I planted them, and they grew into plants, but they weren't growing that fast. It seemed they needed something, like a fertilizer, and I had just learned about fertilizers in school, so I tried to figure out how to get some. I thought poop would, in fact, be the best idea.

By this time, I had lived there for months and months. I didn't start counting the days until much later, so I wasn't sure how long. With one of the creatures that were interested in learning to weave fabric and stuff, I actually started teaching it English. I tried learning their language, but for some reason they were really shy about talking to me in their language; maybe they still didn't trust me, and wanted to be able to talk amongst themselves in front of me without me figuring out what they were saying. Also, I just had a lot of trouble pronouncing their words, with their super-low-pitched voice and all. So, I was teaching them words like "over" and "under" and such for weaving, and "grass" and "seed" and so forth, and they could pronounce English words with no problem at all. With words, too, they were such quick learners, and we could give each other short instructions and suggestions and such while working together.

When I decided I needed some fertilizer for the spice plants, I managed to convey to them that the plants were not doing as well as I thought they should. They were a little disappointed. Then, I tried to teach them a bunch of words to mean that I needed some poop... preferably from large animals. I had that morning found some poop from a small forest mouse-like thing, so I brought it out and showed it to them, saying "poop," and shrugged my shoulders, then I said "I need big ones..." and made a gesture with my arms spread out, to mean "big."

This request baffled them more than any other. They largely seemed to understand what I was asking for, especially the word "big," but they were a bit confused about the reason. So, I pointed to the spice seedlings, and said something like, "poop big, plant big, spice big." All four words were known to them, I knew, and, to my great satisfaction, they nodded, a habit they picked up from me. Before they left again that day, they pointed to the seedlings and said, "Hlata need big poop." So I learned that Hlata was the name they had given me, and that these creatures had figured out what "need" means.

They returned with some poop after a long time. It seemed they made some effort to find the right kind rather than just scoop up some poop lying about. These were not ordinary poops. They were large chunks of poops... I now know these were fermented, composted chunks of poop

of large cat-like plant-eating animals that lived in the valley. At any rate, the effect of the poop fertilizer on the spice plants was immediate. They just took off, and within a couple of months, they were blooming and forming fruits. All my other plants took off, too, with the poop. For fun, I also fertilized the grassy plants, and the effect was not as dramatic but definitely noticeable.

When the spice fruits seemed ready, I spoke to one of the weavers:

“Ready?” I asked.

“Ready? Eat?” it said in reply.

“Ready to eat?” I asked again.

It poked at the fruit, then declared, "Ready to eat!"

The creature ran screaming at the top of its lungs to the others, and there was great joy, and everyone watched still and silent while I picked a couple of the fruits and handed it to one of them. It scraped off the skin and revealed the chalky flesh. It scraped off a teeny, tiny bit of the flesh, and sprinkled it on the back of its other hand. It tasted it... and basically burst out in tears of joy.

I had never heard these creatures sing or play music or seen them dance. I had until then thought of them as basically very intelligent raccoons who could be trained to talk.

The festival they held that night at my "village" was a splendid display of art and skill. They brought all sorts of instruments, and they played rather complicated songs, with many different syncopated melodies playing at the same time. Some of the instruments were made from plant parts, but most of them were made from carefully contoured pottery, strung or covered with some kind of animal parts. They produced the most unexpectedly moving sound.

And the dances! They tended to dance in three separate groups. There was one group, generally older or just more quietly disposed, who sat in a clump in the middle. They danced quietly, mostly swaying to the rhythm, singing or humming along with the music. The second group formed a circle around the middle group, and danced a line dance, going around and around in a circle. The pattern was very complex, and occasionally they split into two, three, or four different groups doing very different moves, and then came back together. When the patterns repeated, it was a different set of them doing the moves this time, and so forth. Maybe it was random, I couldn't tell. The third group, they were the wild dancers, and they danced around the outskirts of the dance floor, free-form dancing, some suggestive of the choreographed circle, but mostly completely wild and individual. And they kept going all night long... never once changing

from one group to another.

I can never forget that evening, and our relationship changed forever. From then on, I thought of them as my people, and they saw me as one of them.

Seasons never seemed to change there, and I got used to the monotony of it all. The plants I planted grew and grew, and soon all the cleared space in my “village” was overgrown with shrubs and plants bearing fruits of all shapes and sizes. The creatures kept bringing me different kinds of plants to try planting, and some of them would work and some of them would not. Many of the things they brought me were not plants at all. Once we had figured out what plants could be grown from seeds and what couldn't, I started to teach them how to plant the seeds themselves. The foods at the festivals became more and more abundant as the weeks and months went by, which meant more and more fertilizers had to be brought in to keep up with the plants' growth.

It seemed, in fact, that the creatures were actually trading the fruits we were raising for the fertilizers and leathers and stuff that we needed. I'd taught them enough English to learn that the fertilizers were coming from “very far” and from “very big” animals. The leather, which I began to actually sew into shirts and pants using leather threads which the creatures had devised, apparently came from not so far away from not very big animals. I tried to ask them whether we should try to raise these animals ourselves, and the very concept seemed to really confuse them, so I dropped the subject after a while. As with the seeds, I figured I'd just show them by doing it.

It did get to a point where we needed to grow some more grassy plants just to keep up with the mat production and such. Fertilizing the existing plants was not enough. We needed more of them, but I could not figure out how to get their seeds. Then, I remembered my parents weeding out the thistle plants in our garden, and about their underground stems. So I dug up a grassy plant, confirmed the underground stem, and transplanted it to an open spot. Soon, little grassy plants started popping up around the plant that I moved. We started moving the grassy plants more and more, encouraging more offshoots, and soon we had more than enough of these grassy plants. I asked the creatures to find more space where they could plant more of these plants, and judging by the amount of stuff and produce they were dealing with, it seemed they found plenty of space somehow, somewhere.

I always wondered what they were doing with the ropes, tho'.

I was picking up more and more of their language, too, and could hold some rudimentary conversation with some of the younger creatures. Things that had to do with what I did and what I taught them to do, we always spoke about in English. All our conversations about the plants and fertilizers and weaving and sewing were in English. Things that had to do with what they did and what they were teaching me to do, we tried our best to speak about in their language.

Interestingly, the first thing they really wanted me to learn was their calendar system. Because they had four fingers and toes on each of their six limbs, they used an 8-based number system, and everything was divided into 24's. To my convenience, they divided the day into 24 hours, and each hour (which is about 20 minutes in our time) into 24 minutes, and each minute into 24 seconds, and so forth. They kept time using a very elaborate sundial, and many of the creatures seemed to take turns making sure that it was oriented in the right direction and such, as it needed to be moved constantly to keep correct time. Of course, their day was only about one third of the day long in our time, and each minute seemed to be a little shorter than our minute. [1 day = $(60 \times 24) / 3 = 480$ minutes our time, $(24 \times 24) = 576$ minutes their time.] They had a unit like a "month" which was, oddly, 25 days, having to do with the minute changes in the brightness of the sun or something, which I never understood. So one month of their time was like a week to me. They had a unit like a "year," which did not go with the months, and was 796 days in their time, with an occasional leap day added, having to do with the movement of the sun and small changes in season, much like our year.

They remembered everything in their heads. They didn't yet have a way of writing anything down, so they remembered *everything*. They were not very creative, but they learned very quickly, and they never forgot. They would play the same music over and over at all the festivals, for instance, with some changes here and there once in a while, but never really creating anything new. Sometimes, they would divide up the job of remembering, some of the creatures remembering more about the plants and foods and how to grow them, and some of the other creatures remembering when things happened how and why.

They kept track of their records by remembering which day of the month and which day of the year something happened. They never kept track of how many years or months had passed by.

They hardly ever needed to figure out how many years ago exactly something happened; when they did, they'd just work back the calendar until they found the correct combination of the day of month and the day of year. Some of the "memory keepers" could do this immediately from memory.

They were very intent on teaching me their calendar system, and I studied it as hard as I could. I was pretty good at math, but it was very confusing, and I never did get the hang of it. It didn't help that they basically had no seasons.

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3.2 The Trades

According to the Valley Creatures, who were the next ones, after the Field Creatures, to hear about the Great One, the Great One had decided that she could not provide for the Forest Creatures' needs on her own. Of course, the Forest Creatures had everything they needed. The Forest had provided for them very well long before the Great One arrived. They were never wanting in fruits and mud. They had so much fruits that they traded them far and wide for everything else they didn't need but wanted nonetheless. They had so much mud that they didn't use them just for building their houses and for cleaning the bugs off their fur. They made many vats, and traded them for everything else they didn't need but wanted nonetheless. They traded, most of all, for 'lala fruits, which they adored, for it made it enjoyable to eat even more of their forest fruits. The Forest Creatures were thus greedy, but they were always fair in trade. They never took without giving. In return, the Field Creatures, who gave them leather, and the Valley Creatures, who gave them insect meats, never had any disagreements with the Forest Creatures.

Until the Great One came.

The Valley Creatures had heard from the Field Creatures that the Forest Creatures had begun a new kind of trade. Rather than have the Field Creatures harvest the skins of their sleeping dead for leather, the Forest Creatures came and took them themselves, leaving Blamas leather and vattery, which were useless to the Field Creatures, but they took the trade nonetheless, as it seemed fair.

The Valley Creatures were concerned, because they were already collecting as much insect meat as there was. Every year, the insects came from the Outlay, fat from the greasy foods they ate in the Outlay, their bodies soft and not so chewy for the Childing. In the Valley, they lay their children, and they die in great numbers. No one eats the dead insects but the Valley Creatures and the Forest Creatures. The Valley Creatures give almost all of it to the Forest Creatures for vattery, which they need to keep water, and fruits, which they need to eat with the insect meat. And so they could not make more insect meats. Some Valley Creatures spoke of refusing to trade. Some Valley Creatures spoke of trying to live without vattery and fruits. But that would be too hard. So they

were concerned.

When the Forest Creatures came for the yearly trade, the Valley Creatures were ready with the insect meats. It was a good year for insect meats. The Valley Creatures thought the Forest Creatures would be pleased, at least for this year.

But the Forest Creatures did not demand more of the insect meats. They took what they always took, not a bit more, not a bit less, and left the same amount of vattery and fruits as always. The Valley Creatures were happy.

When the Forest Creatures were gone, however, the Valley Creatures discovered that the Forest Creatures had been taking the poop of the cats. No one but the Valley Creatures had ever needed or wanted the poop of the cats. The cats, they roamed the valley, eating leaves and tree skin and grass roots and insect children. They ate a lot, and they made a lot of poop. The Valley Creatures left the poop to dry, then the poop ripened and sprouted mushrooms, which the Valley Creatures didn't like to eat, as they smelled foul like the poop, but it kept them free from the Valley worms that drank their blood. The Forest Creatures knew nothing of Valley worms, and the Valley Creatures had never told them of the Valley worms or the mushrooms on the poop. The mushrooms on the poop of the cats were not like mushrooms in the Forest, which were sticky and low and soft. The mushrooms cannot be easily seen. It was the Valley Creatures' big secret. They feared that other Creatures may want to trade for it if they knew the mushrooms kept off the worms, and the Valley Creatures would not be able to refuse, and they didn't have much. Besides, no one had worms like the Valley Creatures did. They had many legs that kept them stuck in the fur of the Creatures. If you tried to take it off, it broke apart into pieces, and each piece was still stuck on the skin, drinking the blood, and eventually had children. None of the other creatures had worms as sticky as the Valley Creatures' worms, so none of the other creatures needed the mushrooms on the poop of the cat as much.

The Valley Creatures were furious, but at first they could not even speak to the Forest Creatures about it for they had no trading signs for the Valley worms or the mushrooms or the poop of the cat. They finally could speak about it when they actually caught a Forest Creature picking up a poop of the cat, making up a new trading sign, complaining vigorously that they must not take the poop. The Forest Creatures didn't understand why the Valley Creatures wanted to keep

them so badly, it's just poop, and the Valley Creatures didn't want to tell them why. The Valley Creatures offered other poop, but the Forest Creatures insisted that the poop had to be from something very big, and no land animal was bigger than the cats in the Valley.

But, it didn't matter, it was too late. Once you have a trading sign for something, you must trade it, or not trade anything at all. The Valley Creatures had no choice but to make a deal, and the Forest Creatures were again generous and fair, leaving the Valley Creatures with as much Blamas grass strings as they wanted.

The Valley Creatures used the strings to collect the insects. As the insects are very big and very strong and very soft, it was difficult to gather them until they were completely dead after having laid children. With the strings, the Valley Creatures could catch and tie down the insects before they were dead, and could catch the children as they were laid. So the Valley Creatures, in the end, were eating very well, as there was no trading sign for the meat of the insect children. Eventually, they kept some of the insect children alive, held down by a Blamas grass string, feeding them greasy fish from the Valley rivers, which the Valley Creatures could not eat, for they made them very sick.

However, they lost very many of their cat poop mushrooms, and had trouble keeping the Valley worms off of their skin. Even the Hlata Blamas strings could not help them with that.

The next to hear of the Great One were the Shore Creatures. One year, the Forest Creatures did not arrive on the trading day to collect their 'lala fruits. The Shore Creatures were very anxious about the trade this year, as their stores of ocean fish and fruits were getting rotten because they did not take good care of their vats and the vats had cracks on them. They really needed the vats of the Forest Creatures.

Of all the creatures, actually, the Shore Creatures were the most skillful at making vats. They made very beautiful vats, colored with sands and plant juices, that were much valued by the Field Creatures, among others. They made a point of storing their very best 'lala fruits in their own vats, and traded their 'lala fruits in those beautiful vats, so that all other Creatures would know how valuable and wonderful their 'lala fruits were. The 'lala fruit trees grew very slowly on the shores of the ocean, and bore their fruits only once a year, when the ocean water grew cool and the fishes came in great numbers.

However, the Shore Creatures had very little mud to work with, as they had to squeeze the

mud from the sand with great many days of work. It was this special way that made their vats very beautiful.

Anyway, the Shore Creatures needed the vats of the Forest Creatures, which were not very beautiful but were very strong, to keep their food stores, and the Forest Creatures never came. One of the Shore Creatures, on a trading day with the Field Creatures, saw a Forest Creature, and asked it why they never came that year, do they not need 'lala fruits? The Forest Creature said it could not answer, because the Great One had commanded that the 'lala fruits be ready to eat, and not be brought in from the Shore. The Shore Creature then got angry and demanded to know what that meant, and the Forest Creature said the Great One did not permit them to speak of matters of divinity except in her words. War would have broken out right then and there, for not speaking of matters of trade was breaking of way-rules, but the Valley Creatures and the Field Creatures who were all there for the trading day got interested, and stopped the argument. They explained to the Shore Creature that the Forest Creatures had changed many of their trades since the Great One arrived, and that they no longer have need for 'lala fruits from the Shore Creatures because the Great One created them from the ground. The Shore Creature refused to accept this explanation, for 'lala fruits, everyone knew very well, came from ancient trees that stood in sunny spots by the Ocean, and one of the Field Creatures brought one of its cousins who said it had seen the 'lala fruits hanging in shrubs that grow in sunny spots in the Forest. The Shore Creature said there were no sunny spots in the Forest, and the Field Creature's cousins said there were now, and the Forest Creatures were cutting down their trees as fast as they could to plant more 'lala shrubs and Blamas grasses, and they grew so fast and lush and the 'lala shrubs bore far more 'lala fruits than any of the trees it had seen growing by the ocean shore.

The Shore Creature was furious and crestfallen at the same time. For as long as the months ran with the years, for as far back as the memories remember, the 'lala fruits were the pride of the Shore Creatures. All the Creatures desired the Shore Creatures' 'lala fruits, and the shore was the only place they grew, and the Shore Creatures traded them for everything they needed, fair and generous.

And now, the Valley Creatures and the Field Creatures told the Shore Creature, that the Forest Creatures had enough 'lala fruits for themselves, and in fact wanted to trade some that they had left over, for they needed more and more poop of the cat and leather and such, for the Great

One was putting all of the Forest Creatures at work producing more and more 'lala fruits and other fruits and some sweet fruits that the Forest Creatures didn't care for but the Great One loved them, there were now hundreds of Forest Creatures working on making more Blamas grasses strings and mats and blankets, because the Great One had commanded them. And the Valley creature needed more Blamas strings to catch the insects before they died and they needed to eat more and more to keep their blood purple and the Field Creatures never thought to get that much 'lala fruits before because they could not make that much leather and the Shore Creatures didn't want that much leather, just enough to get the fruits they needed from the Forest Creatures, and now the Forest Creatures wanted to know if they could raise their Blamas grasses in the Field, and...

The Shore Creature went home, confused and upset. It appeared that no one wanted to trade for 'lala fruits any more. The Valley Creatures and the Field Creatures had never needed very many of them, and the Forest Creatures had demanded very many. And now no one wanted the Shore Creatures' 'lala fruits.

Truth Be Known, the 'lala fruits which the Forest Creatures grew at the Great One's command were not as good as the ones that the Shore Creatures grew. The Forest 'lala fruits were bigger, fluffier, and sweeter, which made the food taste more wet, and so they had to use more. Once they were growing more and more 'lala fruits, of course, the Forest Creatures ate more and more of them, and their memories began to loosen. The Forest Creatures always had the most truthless memories, and they knew this, and every Creature knew that this was because they ate so much 'lala fruits, and the Forest Creatures had more memory keepers than other Creatures because they knew their memories were truthless. Their memory keepers also did not remember everything, but just pieces, each memory keeper with a different memory, so that no memory would be lost on a memory-keeper eating too much 'lala fruit.

Perhaps it was because their memory was already short of truth that the Forest Creatures were the first to use words, and the first to trust words.

It is also said that the 'lala fruits made the Forest Creatures make good music, because they could not remember well, they made up more music, and this helped them make good music. We will never know, for the Forest Creatures are now all gone, and neither word nor memory can keep

music, but it is said that their music could move any Creature to dance, however sad or tired or weary, and it is also said that it was because of their music that the Great One had chosen them.

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4.1 The Judgment

Then something happened that changed my role in the creatures' society. The creatures still had not allowed me to see their village, oh, for months and months, perhaps years. They did all the weaving and planting and such around my house, and always returned back to their village, and, using a rather pissy tone of voice they would forbid me from leaving my house. I didn't mind. Whenever I tried to take a little walk I kept finding that sticky stuff that I had fallen into when I first arrived here. It was not so easy to see from my height, although the Forest Creatures, from their height, could see the shiny edge very easily. I never did see the spider—I figured it was like a spider web—that made the web, and I never saw anything trapped in it, either. It never occurred to me to ask them what it was. Instead, I learned how to avoid them when I took walks around the forest.

Anyway, one day, just three of the creatures came to see me, and started saying, "Come! Come! Come!" while hopping up and down on two feet. I thought maybe another party was on, and finally at someone else's house, so I eagerly followed them. They ran very fast across the forest, hopping over the sticky webs whenever they came across them. I tried to walk as fast as I could without getting stuck in the sticky webs or tripping over anything.

When I came to their village, I was in for a big surprise. I had known that I was basically living in an abandoned village, like a ruin, so whatever shape my house was in was not exactly the state of the art. However, their village was something altogether. They had built a sprawling city out of bricks, not mud bricks like with my house, but real ceramic bricks, which were not only made with wooden molds into interlocking shapes, but were also baked to a kind of shine that I had only seen on my mother's finest china. They were decorated with colorful drawings, abstract and representational, some with floral designs and some with animals and landscapes. They seemed to favor purple, the color of their blood.

And here I was all smug that I taught them how to make grass skirts.

Another sight was the creatures themselves. When they came to visit me, they were just in their furs, so naked, with an occasional cloak or some length of string as an adornment. But, in the village, the creatures were all fully clothed in shirts and pants and skirts and dresses and cloaks and

such, all made from the grassy fabric I'd taught them to make. They were, in fact, basically dressed as I was, except I was wearing leather clothes and they were wearing grass clothes. This was so stunning to me.

And then there were the gardens. They had planted all over their village with the grassy plant and the fruit plants that I had taught them to grow from seed and transplant and divide. There were more of the spicy fruit trees than I could count. At my house, there was a separate garden for the plants we were growing, and they were separated by species. In the village, however, the plants were all mixed in all over the place. It seemed that each household had its own garden, with one or two of each plant in every garden, except each of the yards was not fenced off or marked or anything. They had probably kept track of whose plant was whose by sight and memory.

At any rate, I was finally lead to what appeared to be a central plaza of the village. They, in fact, called it "*plasa*," which apparently actually meant "the sacred place." In the *plasa* was a large crowd of the creatures, and there were three creatures standing in the middle, facing each other, poised to do something they might regret later, angry and furious (which, to us, would look like they were about to burst into laughter).

The three tried to explain the situation to me in their language, but they spoke at the same time, really fast, and really low-pitched, and really angry, so I had quite a bit of trouble understanding them. The gist of it seemed to be that they had lost count of something, or someone lost something, or someone was lost... I kept asking them to repeat, but it didn't help at all. I could not get the hang of their words that mean these different things, because I had thought of all these different words as meaning "lost," and I just confused myself. One of the creatures kept pointing in one direction, where I could not see anything of special interest, and seemed to be saying that the objects of contention were over in that direction.

I finally said, in English, "Bring," and pointed in the same direction.

This completely startled all the creatures present. They looked at each other, using a facial expression equivalent to us shrugging our shoulders to say "I don't know if I can deal with that; can you deal with that?" for a while, not saying a word.

One of the creatures finally asked me back, "Bring? Bring to Hlata?"

I said, "Yes, Bring to me. Please."

They again looked at each other with a resigned expression, and they all scattered in every direction, not just the three, but every member of the crowd.

And then they began returning, one by one, with a plant in their hands. They had simply all gone back to their houses, and uprooted their precious plants, and brought them all back to the *plasa*. Before I could even say anything, the pile of plants was growing, and growing, plants coming by the creatures from every direction. Soon, every single one of the cultivated plants in the village were at my feet. Piled up. In the sun.

When they were finished, no one spoke. They looked at me in anticipation.

I looked back at them in puzzlement. What do you want me to do with these? I muttered sort of to myself. I was more distressed than anything that they had uprooted months and months of hard work.

They looked at me with even more anticipation in their eyes.

I finally said, in their language, what I hoped meant, “What do you want me to do?” but what I really said was, “What is all this?”

This, of course, puzzled them a great deal.

One of the creatures, finally, approached me gingerly. It said, searching for words, “Divide! Divide!”

Now, I knew that they used the word “Divide,” in English, to mean the process by which I divided the grassy plants to make them spread. I think, now, looking back, I think the creature was just trying to tell me that these were divided like I divided them, don’t I recognize them, or something like that, but I didn’t think that far, and just thought that the fight in the first place was about whose plant was whose and now I was being asked to divide the pile among them.

So, I picked up a plant, a spicy fruit plant, and handed it to one of the creatures. I said, “Go plant it,” an expression I often used in my garden and which I knew they understood.

Then, I picked up a bland fruit plant, and handed it to another creature, and said, “Go plant it.”

Then, I picked up a grass plant, and did the same.

And so it went on, for what seemed like the rest of the day, until every single plant was handed out.

When it was over, I noticed that there were about a dozen creatures left without a plant. I

thought about this for a second; I hadn't realized that there were more creatures than there were plants. It seemed that, in fact, there were more plants than there were creatures, seeing that every one of them had appeared to be going back and forth uprooting and carrying plants to the *plasa*. I noticed that one of the creatures remaining was one of the original three in the fight, one I had seen often before at my house.

I called them all closer, especially the fighter. They seemed quite happy not to have received a plant, and to think that there was something even more special in store for them. It turned out, they were right.

I spoke very slowly in English, since I didn't know how to say this in their language, "I need to learn your words. I need words, to learn. So I can speak," I gestured my mouth moving, "to you," and gestured toward them.

They were very, very excited about this, so much more than I expected, or wanted for that matter. I thought, what, am I really that bad a talker?

It turned out this day had gone completely differently than I had thought. You see, until that day, they all lived in this village together, with no leader or anything. They just worked things out through arguments, and whoever thought it had the strongest argument proceeded to stomp its feet, and if no one challenged it, that's how the decision was made. If no one challenged the decision, those who disagreed simply went along or left, sometimes leaving the village forever. Hardly had it happen that more than one creature stomped their feet, and hardly, if ever, had it happen that anyone challenged a stomped decision. This day, however, the three creatures had very, very different, irreconcilable differences—I still don't know what it was—and yet they had all proceeded to stomp or challenge each other or something. Too many creatures were involved in the disagreement for the traditional solution of splitting the village and the dissenters leaving forever. Furthermore, a three-way split had never happened before, and it wasn't even clear which faction(s) should stay and which faction(s) should leave.

At any rate, the fight obviously had something to do with their cultivated plants, and when I said "Bring, please," they thought I wanted them to bring every one of them to me, in the *plasa*. And when I handed each kind of plant to each creature, I had forever divided them into three clans, each designated by and responsible for tending to the plant. Whatever the original dispute was, this seemed like a suitable solution, for they accepted it without protest.

In fact, I had created four clans, the fourth clan consisting of the remaining creatures. They no longer did any of the work involving agriculture, but tended to me, living in a separate village closer to my house, visiting me more often, and, due to an obvious miscommunication, learning English as thoroughly as they could from me. These creatures, who came to see themselves as “chosen,” although I tried to assure them that all creatures in the village should be equal to one another, were no less hard working than the other creatures. They were chosen more often to go on trading trips, to explore unknown parts of the forest, to scout for land outside the forest we could use for planting our crops, and other such roles. The other villagers were, in fact, relieved to know that they could just concentrate on tending the plants and their other traditional activities, leaving the business of dealing with that troublesome, tall stranger to these few. For some reasons, while the other creatures dressed themselves more and more, the English speakers always remained unclothed.

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4.2 The Judgment

Now the memory I put to words here all come from memories of memories of memories of the Forest Creatures, and so must be thought a lie. The Forest Creatures are no longer around to tell us if this is true, and even if they were they could not be trusted. Yet, maybe someone else can remember something that makes these true, since it seems true from what else we know about the Forest Creatures.

Once a great dispute broke out among the Forest Creatures. Before the Great One came, the Forest Creatures worshipped the One God. It was this One God who had been prophesied to send the Great One to one of the Creatures. It was this One God who had built the Forest and had told the Forest Creatures to go live in the Forest, and had taught the Forest Creatures everything they needed to know to live in the Forest. It was this One God who had taught them their music, their memory, their bricks, and their vattery. They believed that the One God belonged to all the Creatures, although none of the other Creatures believed in it, since some of them had their own gods, and some of them didn't have any gods. So naturally the Forest Creatures believed that the One God must have taught all the other Creatures everything that they knew.

Because they believed in the One God, and in the Nation of One Creature, the Forest Creatures never divided themselves the way other Creatures did. When dispute broke out and it seemed that they could not remain in the same Nation, they split off into two Nations rather than have discord and division within the Nation. Many of the Forest Creatures thus came to live among other Creatures, and we have no way of knowing which ones among us now are their children's children.

When the Great One came to teach the Forest Creatures new skills of the forest, it became clear to them that the Great One did not herself follow all the teachings of the One God. For one, the Great One grew many kinds of fruits out of the ground, and she kept them separated in her gardens, and marked them with different vattery, and used them at different times, and refusing to ever taste the 'lala fruits.

The Forest Creatures were not sure what to make of this. Some of the Forest Creatures thought that they should continue to live by the memory of the One God's teachings, for the Great One, who they still believed was sent by the One God, never told them to do otherwise. So, in fact, they raised their plants as One Plant, not distinguishing between the different fruits, although they were clearly different in how they were raised and harvested.

However, some of the Forest Creatures thought that they should live as the Great One did, dividing the plants according to its kind, for, if the Great One was sent by the One God, clearly her examples were to be followed as a new teaching from the One God.

Still others believed that growing of plants was in the first place contrary to the teachings of the One God, that the Great One was sent to grow the plants for them, and, it was true, the Great One had forced them to plant the plants in and around her temple, but she had never told them to plant the plants in the village or anywhere else outside the temple. To these, most of whom were in fact closest to the Great One, this whole debate was a moot one from the beginning. Only the Great One was divine enough to perform miracles.

Crisis came when all three arguments won. This had never happened to the Forest Creatures before. The Valley Creatures, they voted. The Shore Creatures, they declared war. The Field Creatures, they slept it off until they could reach an agreement. The Forest Creatures, they always decided, and the losers shut up and went along or left forever. They never had many winners before.

It seemed reasonable for them, then, that the Great One herself be asked. Now, the temple of the Great One was a very sacred place, and many of the Forest Creatures did not dare go there, for just a quick drink from the sacred river would kill them instantly unless they are completely pure at heart, and who is? Only the Great One was. So some of the Forest Creatures who were miraculously not involved in the argument were sent to fetch the Great One.

The Great One came, and was very sore and displeased, and kept bellowing words, as she often did, and eventually demanded a sacrifice for penance. The Forest Creatures had not done a sacrifice for as long as their memories could speak, and clearly the Great One was not pleased that they had lost their way, this dispute being just the final grass. The problem was, they had no memory of what exactly it was that they used to sacrifice, if they ever did. When a confusion broke out and everyone started talking to the Great One at the same time, she hushed them, and demanded that whatever they were fighting over was exactly what should be sacrificed. Since it was their plants

that they were fighting over, although they were their most precious possessions, the Forest Creatures went on to take out all of their plants, and brought them to the village temple, where the Great One waited. They realized that they had really crossed the Great One this time, and that the punishment would be severe. They were now to lose their new way of life as a punishment.

Now, what happened next, some Forest Creatures spoke of as an act of great mercy. Perhaps. Most of us believe that this was the moment that turned the memory. Until this moment, the Great One was but a visitor in a small Nation, changing their way of life, and out of the way changing everyone else's, but of no real results to everyone else. From this moment on, the Great One had declared her will to change the way of the World, and so it shall be.

She, first, divided the Forest Creatures into four clans. Even though this was contrary to the teachings of the One God, the Forest Creatures understood that this was partly a punishment, for they had proven themselves unworthy of remaining the One Nation. The Great One had come to enrich their ways as a reward, but instead they took her gifts and destroyed their own way of life with them. So, it was decreed, their old way of life was gone forever.

Then she gave each of the clan a new mission. The clans swore to the Great One that they would uphold their new assignment, for fear of disappearance, as a sacred duty.

One of the clans was given the name of the 'lala fruits. They were the flavor and spice of the creatures. They preserved the music, the joy, and life of the Nation, and they preserved the crafts of weaving, vattery, and, later on, weaponry.

One of the clans was given the name of the Blamas grasses. They were the accessories of the people. They protected the Nation from foreigners and their ways. They were the warriors, although the Forest Creatures had never had wars.

One of the clans, which was really divided into many clans, each bearing the name of a fruit, but they were known as the One Clan, and they were the backbone of the Nation. They produced the food stuffs of the Nation and the Blamas grasses and the 'lala fruits and the mud for vattery and everything else the other clans needed. They lived the closest to the Forest Creature's old way of life, although they were also the Most Divided.

The last clan, the Nameless Ones, was the priests and lieutenants of the Great One. They learned and kept the words of the Great One. Many of us word users today learned our craft from the students of students of students of the Nameless Ones. They also spread the words of the Great

One to the other nations, teaching every other Nation the way of things to come.

It was through the spreading of the words that the Great One came to be the Great One of All Creatures.

It is believed that this happened in the year that we now call the oneth year of the Great One.

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5.1 The Growth

It seems I was eating and tending to myself very well, for I was growing even taller. I think I had been there about two years of our time when I started keeping track of my height. I had already noticed that I was outgrowing my clothes, and I really began to tower over these creatures. The creatures didn't seem to notice that I was getting taller. Most of the business went on as usual, with me tending to my gardens, and with them tending to my gardens. Since the incident at the *plasa*, however, they pretty much gave me free access to their town, their houses, and their gardens. Perhaps they hadn't wanted to confine me to my own little place. Maybe it was just me who felt uncomfortable roaming around freely in the forest. Maybe I wanted to protect myself by keeping to what I knew and knew well, rather than go off on explorations and stuff. Whatever the case may be, I certainly did feel more free to roam the forest and get to know the forest better. I was still somewhat terrified of the sticky webs, but once I felt more comfortable being "free" in the forest, I could get around them better. In fact, it felt as if there were fewer and fewer of them the more I felt comfortable with the forest and became familiar with its different parts.

I had suspected that there were more of these creatures all over the forest, rather than just in this village, and that there must be more forests like this all over this world. They did not speak much of these other places and other creatures, and even as their English got good enough to hold rather ordinary conversations with me, they still were hesitant to talk about them. So I let the subject rest for now, as I did with many other subjects. I did notice that once in a while a great convoy of these creatures would leave their village, carrying vast amounts of fruits and fabric and ropes, and be gone for days and days, later to return with vast amounts of goods that they do not produce in their village, such as the leather for my clothing. So there must be others out there, producing these other things.

Mostly, they wanted to talk to me about the businesses within their village. Since the *plasa* incident, which they took to calling "the Judgment" in English, they came to me frequently to settle all sorts of disputes. As their English got better, and as I came to understand more of their language, the "judging" business got easier and easier for me. For the most part, since I didn't know what

their traditions were, I would ask them how these things would normally have been settled. Their answer for most of the issues was that things had always been settled by "winning," by which they meant that foot-stomping business. This seemed a bit silly to me, so I tried to tell them about agreeing on things, compromising, and voting. The other main method of settlement seemed to be by "memory," or how things had been settled before. The problem was, there were so many of them who were "memory keepers," and they often disagreed with each other. It seemed that they were disagreeing with each other more and more since about the time I had arrived; trying to decide what to do with me must have strained their system, seeing that I was such an unprecedented event.

So, I tried to sort things out for them first by introducing something like a jury system. They should vote and elect people who would make these judgments, and the panel of jury should also vote to make the decisions. They still preferred to come to me for decisions for which consensus could not be reached, but the jury system seemed to suit most of their disputes well. Since they relied on memory so much, whichever precedent that more creatures remembered, it stood to reason, should be considered the correct memory. Judging by the fact that more and more decisions were made by the jury, and that I came to be asked only for decisions that the jury could not reach, the system seemed to be working for them. Not surprisingly, most of the creatures were too busy tending to their various crafts to find time to be on the jury, so most of the time there were fewer creatures wanting to be on the jury than there were openings, so an "election" as such was held very rarely. Also, most of the jury came from those creatures who had taken to living closer to me, since they could converse with me more easily, and since they weren't doing as much farming and vat-making.

Another thing I tried to get them to do was to write things down. This was a bigger problem, and took longer to settle. As clever and dexterous as they were, the kind of small and delicate movements which writing requires took them a lot of effort. They could produce the most beautiful paintings on their ceramic bricks using the teeniest brushes, and they could weave the grasses into the most delicate fabrics, but they just had a rather strangely hard time with writing. The other problem was that I just could not figure out a good way to write down their language. Their consonants were quite similar to English consonants, but they seemed to have just one vowel, "ah," which was said in many different ways. Because their pitch was so low, I could never learn to speak the vowels correctly, and I was always mixing up my words whenever I spoke their language.

Whenever I tried to write down a word in their language, then, it would turn out that I had confused one word with another although they just sounded exactly the same to me. I had thought about skipping the vowels altogether, but then seven or eight completely different words would have the same spelling. So, after a while, I decided to give up, or just leave it up to them to come up with a system for themselves, which they never got around to doing, because they became so fascinated with writing English that they in fact decided to just use English words for their record keeping. For a few of the important words, such as names of plants, and, oddly, my own name, we used an approximation of their language; so I was always referred to as "Hlata" in all these documents.

At any rate, once they started writing things down, things were easier to settle and remember. They, in fact, started writing down all the things about the history and laws of their village that they had previously committed to memory. They often came to ask me for an English word for something or other, and some of the words were really difficult for me to figure out; so I started making up new words, with their help. I tried to also just leave it up to them to make up the English words for themselves, for these were words that were obviously already in their language, but this, also, they never got around to doing.

One effect of all this writing down business was the increased need for leather. At first, we tried using the grass fabric, but the peculiar chemistry of this world made this a really bad idea. I had noticed that things dry here very, very quickly. With the sole exception of the sticky webs and the rivers, almost everything is completely bone dry. The plants dry out to a stringy crisp almost as soon as you harvest them. Even the creatures, who seem so much like animals in our world, dry up very quickly once they die. During the funeral rites, they practically crumble the body on to the burial grounds. I never saw them drink water or any kind of fluid, and they always found it odd that I drank so much.

It did rain quite often, although it always just sort of drizzled. Whenever it rained, all the dry stuff would soak up the water. All the dried grass things we made were instantly ruined as soon as they got wet, because they swelled up so fast, almost coming back to life. Only my leather clothings were resistant to water, as were their ceramic bricks and vats. Their fur also seemed to have the effect of keeping the water off. So they stored everything that needed to stay dry in their ceramic vats, away from the water. Even the mud they used for ceramic making got wet very fast, usually

being dry and hard to dig up, and every time it rained there was a great comings and goings of creatures trying to collect the mud for use in vat making.

So any sort of paper was going to be a waste of time. We could have kept the books in watertight vats, but still they would be too easily ruined. We tried writing on ceramic slabs, using the inks they used for drawing, but the process got too tedious and bulky. As a result, we settled on using leather for the more important writings that needed to be kept a long time, pottery for public notices and permanent records, and grass fabric for passing on messages and such. Obviously, this meant that even more leather had to be acquired, and they needed to produce even more stuff to trade for the leather.

I also discovered that a rather large number of them were actually completely deaf and mute, not being able to produce even the moans and shrieks of a creature in distress. With these creatures, they used a kind of sign language which we called "trading signs" in English, as it was actually developed for trading with other creatures. (This was the first time that they spoke freely about the other creatures.) For some reason, unlike our sign language, this sign language used only the movements of the entire arm, the hands remaining in a closed position at all times. Being so lanky compared to these creatures, and increasingly so, I could not sign as quickly as the creatures, but I could learn it quite well, and soon could converse with the creatures fairly comfortably with signs. Unfortunately, the trading sign was not a complete language, having been developed for trading only, and in fact many key words were missing on purpose so that they do not inadvertently trade things, such as children, that they did not wish to trade.

They didn't let me come along on the trading missions, of course, but they did let me follow them to the edge of the forest a few times. I was stunned by how abruptly the forest ended, and how what seemed to be a completely desolate desert, which we came to call the "field," just began. I discovered, through some wandering and roaming, that the forest was in fact a completely isolated island, and all the rivers basically flowed into the ground at the forest's edge. Once or twice I spotted some animals, much larger than my creatures, or about the same size as I was when I first arrived, that roamed the desert. These were the animals from which the leather came. Seeing how comfortably they lived in the desert, I figured the creatures were right to be confused by the idea of raising these in the forest. If they knew how to hunt them, then, well, they should do it the way they

knew best, I decided. For fear of dehydration, I never ventured off from the forest, where food and water was always plenty no matter how far I strayed.

Some of the English-speaking creatures told me about the trading missions they went to. They told me about a place, a bit far away across the desert, where the rivers reemerged from the ground. We took to calling it the "valley" in English. Apparently, there were creatures living there who kept the animals that made the poop we used as fertilizer. From what I could gather, these creatures were a bit different from my creatures, but until I met them I could not get a clear picture of what these differences were—they were just a bit smaller and slightly darker colored, like the soil where they lived, but otherwise the same—and I just could not get them to draw a picture for me.

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5.2 The Growth

Not only did the Forest Creatures change their ways at the command of the Great One, the Great One herself began to change. When she first arrived, she was already a terrifying height for the Forest Creatures, standing taller than they and even than the Field Creatures. She was not as big as the cats of the Valley, but this was soon to change, for she began to grow with the 'lala fruits. As the fruits and grasses of her garden spread through the Forest, so did the body of the Great One, growing larger by the day until she towered over even the cats of the Valley. She had absorbed the essence of the Field Creatures, whose skin she wore, and their gentle but powerful nature had become a source of her terrifying power. Her voice boomed and bellowed across the Forest as always, and she showed herself at the Forest edges, terrifying the Field Creatures who feared the day she would come and skin them alive for herself.

Her bodily size and power, of course, went with the terrifying power which the Forest Creatures began to wield. Once the Great One divided them into their clans, they became focus minded in their chase for making and gathering. Their farmers grew nothing but fruits and grasses. Their crafters made nothing but vats and Blamas leather. The Nameless Ones and their soldiers trekked across the world in search of trades, and not a single village of Creatures was left out of the reach of their trades. Before, only the Field Creatures who lived near the Forest dealt with the Forest Creatures. Soon, it was the whole Field who were dealing with the Forest creatures. The Valley Creatures were also spread out and uninterested in trade. Soon, it was the whole Valley where they collected the poop of the cats and fought off the Valley worms and caught the insects. Only the Shore Creatures became more and more left out, as they had little to trade for but their 'lala fruits and their beautiful vats, and could get just a little of what they needed from the Field Creatures who still were their best friends.

Whatever, wherever they went, the Forest Creatures decided what was fair. Soon, the memories of fair trade were ignored, as the Forest Creatures started to arrive with words, on leather and bricks, of what the Great One decreed as fair trades. For the other Creatures could not use the words, they believed what the Forest Creatures said were fair trades, even when the words disagreed

with their memories, for memories were no longer used by the Forest Creatures. When some of the other Creatures disputed the Forest Creatures' claims, the Forest Creatures returned with answers from the Great One, who they accepted as the judge.

The Field Creatures, having seen the scary magic of the Great One's ever-growing body, were the first to accept the challenges of the Forest Creatures, and accept the Great One's words as better than the memory. They feared the Great One perhaps because she was without fur as they were, and thought perhaps she had meant to come to them but abandoned them in favor of the Forest Creatures, and that meant that they had failed the One God, for they never believed in it, and so they were marked for punishment. And so they became obedient.

The Valley Creatures were not so terrified of the Great One, but were somewhat thankful to the Great One, for the Blamas ropes were very useful to them. The loss of the cat poop, they lamented, and the Valley worms, they drank their blood and grew in number, but the Valley Creatures they also ate very, very well and stayed healthy as long as they could keep eating. Because there was no trading sign for insect children, Valley Creatures kept all of the meat of the insect children, which they raised themselves, and even in the years when the insects did not come from the Outlay in great numbers they could still eat well.

The Shore Creatures were mad at the Great One. She had changed the rules of the trade, and they had nothing to gain from the Great One, and they certainly did not fear her even with the story of her becoming stronger and louder. They did not worry, for the Field Creatures remained their friends, but they did worry for the day the Field Creatures, too, would abandon them, just like the Forest Creatures, who used to be their best friends.

Once a Field Creature watched in horror as the Great One emerged from the Forest one day and began speaking in trading signs to one of the Nameless Ones. This Field Creature had seen the Great One before, but from a distance, and this was a long time ago, before the Judgment, before the Great One became so big. The sight of the very big Great One was by itself horrible, because of the magic it meant. The way she was screaming the trading signs with her long, narrow arms was even more horrible. She was demanding that the Nameless Ones get more leather in trade. Now, if the Great One knew the trading signs, that meant that she could herself come to the trades, and the Field Creatures already knew that the Great One wanted very many leathers. The Field Creatures no

longer skinned their own dead for trading, as the Forest Creatures did all the work for them now, including skinning the living in their long sleep, but the Forest Creatures were small and clumsy, and they could not take too many leathers. The Great One, however, was now bigger than the Field Creatures, and she looked like she could skin great many Field Creatures, and do so even when they were not in their long sleep, although the leather is not good when the Field Creatures are awake. If she could speak trading signs, that meant she could very well come and skin the living Field Creatures, and leave a fair price, and that no living Field Creatures was safe to roam the Field, for their skin would be traded by the Great One.

This Field Creature called a Sleep Off to decide what to do. It appeared that the Great One could not or would not leave the Forest, but she could demand a trade, and they would not be able to refuse. The only solution was to stop the trade altogether, at great inconvenience to the Field Creatures. And if the Field Creatures could not trade with the Forest Creatures, they could not trade with the Shore Creatures, and the Shore Creatures would surely starve without the fruits which the Field Creatures got from the Forest Creatures and gave to the Shore Creatures, in exchange for their beautiful vats.

During the third Sleep, a memory keeper dreamed that the problem was that a memory was lost. According to this dream, there was once a time when there were no trading signs, and when no trades had to be made, and when every creature could live on what they had on hand. The Shore Creatures ate nothing but fish and 'lala fruits. The Valley Creatures lived on insects and ate very little. The Forest Creatures ate nothing but fruits, and had not known of the 'lala fruits. But, what of the Field Creatures? What did they eat before there was trade? No one now remembered.

The Field Creatures then began to argue. Some said they had always eaten 'lala fruits from the Shore and the fruits from the Forest, and that it was foolish to talk about what they had eaten before. Some said they had always eaten the greasy fish from the river, which was why the river became covered with their houses, although the fish no longer came in great numbers. Some said they had always eaten the roots of the trees of the Forest, as they grew above their houses, and reach into their rooms, and it was silly that anyone would touch the fish or the fruits or anything else. It became clear that no one really remembered, and more Sleeps were done.

Then, one of the other memory keepers suddenly remembered, there was a verse, a song which they had never understood, but they remembered it anyway, as it was their duty, so the new

memory keepers were always taught the song, but they never knew what it meant, and they kept it in their memory only, until they taught it to new memory keepers. It went like this:

The house it stood on many legs
The branches hung with purple leaves
Left to hold the water going
Left to till the furs all glowing.

Now at this Sleep was one who was the child of a Forest Creature who had left the Forest long ago, and this Creature remembered a memory its raisers sang to it when it was a child. It was remarkably the same, and it thought it knew what it meant:

The house that stood on many legs,
kept the branches hung with many leaves,
for they were asked to let them go,
and take the fruits of furs instead.

This creature then explained what it meant... the house that stood on many legs was the dwellings of the Field Creatures, for they had built their houses over the rivers and covered the whole land. One God then built the forest over the Field Creatures' houses, and Forest Creatures ate the fruits that grew in the Forest. Once there was a time when the Field Creatures could eat so much of the roots of the trees that grew on their houses, that the trees of the Forest crumbled and the Forest Creatures had nothing left to eat. So, a trade was made; the Forest Creatures brought the fruits of the trees, and the Field Creatures ate these fruits instead of the roots, which allowed the Forest Creatures to prosper again, and both the Field Creatures and the Forest Creatures could eat well from then on.

Once this was said, many of the other Field Creature memory keepers began remembering verses, after verses, after verses that seemed to mean the same thing.

After three more Sleeps, then, it was decided, the Field Creatures would themselves demand a new trade: leathers for roots. If the Forest Creatures wanted more leather, or if the Great One

wanted more leather, they'd have to let the Field Creatures eat more of the tree roots. This meant that the Forest Creatures would have to stop laying down the spit traps, which kept the mud dry so the roots could not be dug up, and also prevented the Field Creatures from roaming the Forest, who were too tall to see them.

Little did the Field Creatures know, the Forest Creatures had already stopped laying down the spit traps, for it was one of their old ways, and all the old ways were gone on the day of the Judgment.

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6.1 The Screams

I was a bit of a science nut, but my knowledge was limited and quite uneven. One subject about which I knew more than others was biology, and I was very interested in taxonomy. I knew what a Kingdom was, and what a Phylum was, and what an Order was. I knew that there were smaller groupings, but their names and criteria for division were a bit unclear to me. Family and Genus, I understood at some rudimentary level; what made a Species a species, well, I guess nobody knows that for sure, but I remember being frustrated at the difference between species and "breed" or "variety."

I knew basic anatomy, and, actually, I knew about the reproductive organs. I knew about sperms and eggs, what a penis was for and what a uterus was for, etc., but, as with most prepubescent children, I didn't connect these things with sex or sexuality. My older sister [the mother of the nephew mentioned in the introduction] had gone through a massive drama with her puberty and early teenage years, so I knew more than I otherwise would have about puberty and some notion of sexual attraction. I caught her making out with people quite often, and, I think, I've even walked in on her masturbating a couple of times.

At any rate, once I settled into a routine about how to live in this world, I started to work on some kind of scientific understanding of these creatures and other life forms in this world. It seemed there were the same basic Kingdoms: animals, plants, fungi, and other things I couldn't see so I couldn't be sure about. Interestingly, there seemed to be only one major grouping, Phylum and Order I guess, of the plants. All of the plants grew in that same cactus-like way, some being more like grasses and others being more like trees. Only a few of the larger shrubs and smaller trees had flowers that could be readily seen, and the grasses hardly ever bloomed. Still, it seemed that all the different plants basically had the same basic structure of flowers, so maybe that's Family. Even the fruits were rather similar from each other, typically containing a row of white seeds in the middle; perhaps all fruiting plants were closely related to each other. In nature, regardless, most plants spread by propagation rather than through seeds. You hardly saw any kind of seedlings in the Forest, and this was also consistent with the fact that the creatures had no idea about planting seeds.

Or, perhaps, the fruits needed to be eaten whole for the seeds to then germinate in the poop, and the creatures hardly did this. Perhaps planting the seeds deep in the ground made them germinate, because it was more moist.

The flowers were quite similar to the flowers in this world, and definitely contained a girl part and a boy part. There were no small insects that pollinated the flowers, and I could not figure out how pollination happened. It appeared that it was done by wind, but then why would they have such elaborate flowers? Perhaps these were left over from earlier times when smaller creatures were there to help.

Among the animals, there were three basic types. There were the six-legged animals, the many-legged segmented animals, and the fishes. My creatures obviously belonged in the six-legged category, as did those strange lanky animals that roamed the desert. There were these animals that I started calling "insects," for they looked and acted like giant grasshoppers, that came to the forest very rarely. Once I had a chance to examine a dead one more closely, I realized it was really a very specialized form of the six-legged animals, with tough skin that apparently softened before giving birth, which is when they could be killed and eaten. There was a great variety among the six-legged animals, as everywhere I went I met new kinds of animals of all shapes and sizes.

The many-legged animals were like centipedes, but each of the segment was almost its own self. We started calling them "worms." Each segment had its own mouth, although only the "head" had eyes and such. They did not have antennae, and each segment had two legs. They also had tough skin, but with a kind of fuzzy layer, like some caterpillars here. The segments did not come apart, but if you happened to try to kill one of these by cutting it up, each section could go on living for a long time, although wandering kinda aimlessly, and could even eat and reproduce. Some of these were rather pesky parasites, and they could be removed only with medicinal juices. Maybe these had been or still were responsible for pollination, I could not tell.

The fishes were basically the same as ours, although they seemed to have a lot more fins. I guess living in water makes you be the same shape. I could not find out more about the lives of fishes, as they kept away from me and the creatures. Apparently, some of the creatures elsewhere ate them routinely, as did many of the other animals, but my creatures got very sick if they ate them. Their flesh was oily and did not dry quickly when dead like the creatures' flesh did. This was true, by the way, of the insects, too, which supported the creatures' belief that the insects ate a lot of fish.

I expected to find a greater variety of life as I spent more time away from the forest, but it appeared that this was basically it. There were no other kinds of animals that lived in the ocean or the rivers, and even the plants that lived in water were of the basic same type as the land plants. If there were more primitive forms of life in this world, they were well hidden from view, and it would have taken someone a lot more resourceful than me to discover them. I also puzzled over the fact that the most "advanced" animals, the six-legged ones, seemed to have the greatest variety; I had learned that the reverse ought to be true.

The animals definitely did not have boys and girls. They mated, to be sure, but I never noticed any anatomical differences, and the creatures never referred to any anatomical differences. They didn't have "marriage" or anything of the sort. They got together in groups of four or five, and had babies, and the adults then became "raisers" to all the children. When the children were grown, which took about three of their years, the raisers split up. The creatures gave birth to rather largish babies who could immediately walk and eat regular food. This seemed to be the case even with the centipedes and fishes; all animals in this world gave live births to more-or-less independent, largish babies. Each of my creatures only gave birth to one or two babies; with the abundance of food in the forest, and the complete absence of predators, it seemed they didn't need to have that many babies. My creatures lived up to about 10 years, 15 at the most.

So sex was not really on my mind when I reached puberty. My growth spurt continued, and I grew hair everywhere, and my voice sharpened to a soprano, and I started growing breasts. The breasts really freaked them out. It was as if I was growing a new pair of arms or legs or something. I don't know what explanation they had given themselves about my "missing" legs, but here they were, growing into stumps. When I started fashioning bra-like clothing, they considered this especially odd, like I was trying to hide them or something, which I guess I was. I tried to explain about how we have babies and milk and even eggs and hatchlings and all these things in our world, but it just confused them more. I could find examples of animals like them in our world, and of people who live like they do, but they could not find anything familiar about our world. This was a difficult time in our relationship, but it also settled down once they got used to my adult body, perhaps with the sole exception of my even higher-pitched voice.

Once these things started happening, though, I became preoccupied with sex. I didn't miss

boys, exactly. I think you need to be around them to learn that you want them for sex. I just missed touching and feeling and intimate things that my sister had done. I was already jealous of how enjoyable she had seemed to find it all; now I became completely obsessed with it.

And, so, I discovered masturbation... I won't get into the details, but during my early teen years, I was almost constantly masturbating. I even devised various sex toys to enhance the experience. Some of the fruits, it turned out, were great aphrodisiacs, at least for me, and I used them to arouse myself as well as achieve better climax... Well, I knew all about the stages of sex from the "anatomical" point of view, having thoroughly studied my sister's copy of *Our Bodies*, and I wanted to make them happen. With certain fruits, I could climax just by squeezing them between my legs. I experimented and experimented and experimented... and generally had a great time.

Once I became more mature, the frequency went down, but I never stopped living the most sexual life one could live while alone in a strange world.

I tried to be discrete about all this... although I was often tempted to secretly masturbate while meeting with the creatures, and did do so a few times. Nevertheless, they only caught me once during a full-fledged orgasm. I was screaming and kicking and all that, spread out on the ground, and I think I scared them. From then on, I tried to keep it as private as possible, and to do it away from their village. Interestingly, the creatures were not shy or discrete about my masturbations; they called it the "screams," and would routinely ask me how it went.

I never saw them mate, however.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

6.2 The Screams

The Nameless Ones were now in complete control of the Forest Creatures. They claimed that they were the ones appointed by the Great One to learn the words, and to learn to keep the words on leather and bricks and Blamas leather. Their first order of business was to put to words all of their memories. The memory keepers were glad of this, for they were weary of fighting with one another about which was the true memory, for all the 'lala fruits they were eating and would not stop eating, even to keep the memories. Whenever memory keepers argued about which memory was best, however, the Nameless Ones intervened. They forbade the tradition of foot stomping as a way of winning. Instead, they made themselves the Judges, something which none of the Creatures had ever had, and they decided on their own what memory was true. This is why words cannot be true, for they are made by decision, not by memory.

The Judges, who were the most powerful among the Nameless Ones, decided all matters of the Forest Creatures, and even some of the matters of trade were decided by them, which frustrated the other Creatures. When the Judges could not decide on their own, they asked the Great One to decide, and the decision of the Great One was final, even on matters of trade. The Forest Creatures would sooner not trade at all than trade contrary to the wishes of the Great One, so the other creatures had no choice but to trade. Only the Shore Creatures, who traded less and less, managed to continue to defy the Great One and her Judges, but that means nothing when you cannot trade.

The next order of business for the Nameless Ones was to divide everything. The other reason why words are lies is that they insist on dividing. There was one thing that the Forest Creatures had been right about. All Creatures were One Creature. Some of us lived in the Forest, some of us lived in the Valley, some of us lived in the Field, and some of us lived at the Shore, but we were all the same. It was the Nameless Ones who gave us the names of Forest Creature, Valley Creature, Field Creature, and Shore Creature, although it made no sense at all, and we never had names for one another. The Shore Creatures, for instance, when speaking of trade, called the Forest Creatures the 'lala lovers, and they called the Field Creatures the vat-lovers. For when a Forest Creature left the Forest because of losing, and came to live in the Field, its children were born large

and with no fur, and with leather, just as the Field Creature children were born. When a Shore Creature left the Shore because of losing a war, and joined the Forest Creatures, their children were born furry and small like the Forest Creature children were born. We were all the same. Some said even the insects, which every Creature ate, for we did not think of them as Creatures, were really children of One Creature, who had long lost their way for living in the Outlay too long.

The Nameless Ones changed all this. They were obsessed with words, and words demanded divisions, and so they divided the Forest Creatures, and they divided the Creatures from one another. They divided the world into smaller and smaller pieces. They even gave names to every single Forest Creature, so they could put to words everything they knew about them. They named everything, except, of course, themselves.

The old ways of the Forest Creatures were now all gone.

For many years, only the Forest Creatures could see the Great One from closeness. None of the others had known that, for instance, the Great One had only two legs. Now, to the Forest Creatures, this was a sign of divinity, for one of the legends of the One God tells of how it lost two of its legs in a great battle, trying to protect the Creatures from a band of eight-legged demons. The One God refused to fix its legs, for it was a sign of enduring promise that it would always protect the Creatures.

Then, to a great confusion to the Forest Creatures, the Great One started growing her two missing legs, but right by her arms, so she was really growing two arms. This made them fear, for the eight-legged demons had four arms and four legs. When the Great One began growing fur, right by her legs, this made the Forest Creatures fear that the Great One perhaps was one of the eight-legged demons. The Great One then began to explain away this latest of her changes by telling stories about a land where more like the Great One lived, where children who were laid could not eat, and must be fed the arms of the raisers until it could. The arms bled white blood, and fattened the children, and the legs were all gone but the stumps.

The Forest Creatures were somewhat relieved when the two new arms stopped growing, and the new legs never showed up. The Nameless Ones tried to calm the Forest Creatures down by telling more and more of the stories about the Great One's home, but that just confused the Forest Creatures even more, for they had thought that the Great One came from the One God, who had no

place to live, and certainly there could not be many One Gods or many Great Ones. The Forest Creatures began to suspect that the Great One was a hoax, and her divinity lied up by the Nameless Ones for their own benefit. Now, in the old days, an argument would have broken out, and there would have been foot-stomping, and the Nameless Ones would have had to leave, for there were not many of them. Now, however, the Nameless Ones were the Judges, and they decided what was right. They asserted that the Great One was divine, and belonged to the Forest Creatures, and that was that.

As a compromise, or, according to those who believed that the Great One was truly divine, to make things less confusing, the Great One agreed to bind up her arm stumps, hiding them forever from view. This pleased the Forest Creatures, even those who did not believe in her totally, for this made her seem more like the One God who had lost two legs, her wounds bound up as a symbol of her love for the Forest Creatures. Some Forest Creatures even began making up memories about how the One God fed the Creatures with white blood, and such, to make themselves believe better, which then the Nameless Ones put to words, and so the lies remain.

This was when the Field Creatures came to discuss the new terms of trade. They could not stand it that the Great One would come herself and collect the leathers from the living and dead Field Creatures. It was one thing for the small and awkward Forest Creatures to come take as many leathers as they could. There were not enough vats or Blamas leather or even 'lala fruit to cover all the leathers that the Great One could herself take. So they had decided that they should demands roots of trees for trade, which they hadn't eaten as a trade for fruits which the Forest Creatures brought.

The Nameless Ones came to meet the Field Creatures. They were upset because the memory always had been that the Forest Creatures came to the Field, but the Field Creatures were also stingy, and insisted that this new trade be made, and the old trade be broken, since the Forest Creatures were now making all sorts of new trades and breaking many of the old trades. The Nameless Ones were also stingy, and insisted that they did not want this new trade. When the Field Creatures pointed out that there was a trading sign for roots, and this was a fair trade, and the Forest Creatures had to trade, the Nameless Ones became very angry, and said they needed to ask the Judges among them. The Field Creatures said, no, that will not do, for the Judges did not use

memories. The Forest Creatures then said they should ask the Great One herself, for she did use memories.

Then, the Field Creatures demanded that they speak to the Great One directly, as afraid of her as they were, because this was really a trade between her and them, and did not really concern the Forest Creatures, for she was the one who wanted leather and she was the one who now had all the trees and their roots in her garden, so she should be the one to make the trade.

This made sense to the Nameless Ones, so, to the Field Creatures' surprise, they said this was a great idea, for the Great One spoke the trading signs, and could therefore trade, and wouldn't this save a lot of trouble if she could trade with the Field Creatures, rather than trading with the Forest Creatures who then traded with the Field Creatures.

So they took the Field Creatures to the temple of the Great One. Only, they found her not sitting, as she often was, or standing and working in her garden, as she often was, or sleeping, as she did for a whole day at a time, but lying on her back, kicking and shaking her hands, without the clothes she usually wore, and even without the binding of her arm stumps. She breathed fiery hisses, and smoke arose from her wounded stumps. She fed her wounds with fruits, coaxing them to heal.

She was clearly angry, and it seemed she was trying to make her wounded arms and legs grow back, so as to turn herself into an eight-legged one, and put her full wrath upon all the Creatures. This vision stunned the Field Creatures; the Nameless Ones were not afraid at all, which made the Field Creatures all the more afraid.

Then came the screams... loud, piercing, screams that hurt the ears of all around her. There were many weapons which the Creatures had invented, and many more were to be invented after this day, but none was so feared by all the Creatures as the Great One's screams. Terrifying screams that echoed through the Forest and hurt the heads of all Creatures around her.

The scream spoke to the Field Creatures in one word. The Great One had come here on a mission of mercy, but clearly the Creatures had lost their ways. The One God had promised to protect them forever, but the demons will be unleashed and permitted to roam again if they do not obey.

This was the first time the Great One spoke directly to the Field Creatures, and they were very, very scared. The Field Creatures returned home with the bad news. They, too, now had to obey

the Great One, which meant that they had to obey the Judges and the Nameless Ones.

The Great One still never came out of the Forest, so the Field Creatures apparently had some forgive, but the time was to come when the old ways of the Field Creatures, too, would be gone.

And to make this point, the Great One came to the edge of the Forest often, making the same scream, over days and days and days. The Field Creatures lived in dread of the day their old ways would be gone. They knew this would happen in an awful way, but they just didn't know how.

One day, after many, many years, the screams stopped. The Field Creatures thought perhaps the Great One had changed her mind. They were wrong.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

7.1 The Pouring

How this event got to be known as "the pouring" is rather silly, actually. One day, it started raining like I had never seen it rain before, and it never again rained like that the whole time I was there. Even the creatures were surprised by just how much it was raining. I now think perhaps a hurricane of some sort was passing nearby. I've sort of figured it out since I came back. There are many places in our world where the hurricane hits almost every year, and many places where it hits every decade or less. Now, if you picked a particular spot that is hit by a hurricane, that same spot would not be hit again for a long, long time. Considering that the creatures had no records of places outside their own forest, if the hurricane had hit somewhere nearby but not quite, they wouldn't really have noticed, I think, and so if they lived in a continent that was hit once a decade or so, their forest might not be affected for many decades, maybe even centuries, in a noticeable way. Besides, their records, before I taught them how to write, were all kept in memory, and their calendar system repeated itself every time "the month ran with the year," that is, when the 25-day month and the 796-day year coincided every 19,900 days, or 25 years. This is only like 18 years [or 15, if you adjust for Christa thinking 40 years here was 50 years] in our time, but it's far more than a whole lifetime for these creatures, almost double. That could easily be five or six generations later. So even if they had a record of these things happening, it would have to go back at least 40 years, or at least two "the month running with the year," and it would be completely unknown how long ago it really was. And then there is the fact that, they really didn't keep track that far, and their memory lasted barely one cycle of "the month running with the year" without losing a great deal of accuracy.

Anyway, so, it rained for days and days, and on the first day, apparently, I said something like, "Man, it's really pouring." They didn't understand this expression, since I had never used it before. Their language also does not like to use one word to mean different things, so, even though I had said "pouring" as in "pouring water" quite a lot and they knew what that meant, they didn't understand this kind of metaphoric [colloquial] use of the word. Anyway, I said it just meant that it was raining a lot, but the name stuck as the label for this particular event, rather than just that it was raining a lot, and they diligently avoided using the word to mean just "pouring" water, preferring to

say "dumping" and such. The other confusion, which was easier to clear up, had to do with "man." Because I had told them there were men and women in my world, and that I was a woman, seeing that I was in my mid-to-late teenage years, they thought a man was about to come, specifically to pour some water. I told them it was just an expression, a man was not coming, it just means I'm kinda' impressed by this rain. This, they seemed to understand. Their language had many such words.

The effect of the rain was quite staggering, and they certainly had absolutely no record of anything like this happening before, and was not prepared for it happening at all, which I found quite peculiar. At first, the soil just absorbed and absorbed all the water, as it usually did when it rained. It would have released the water gradually to the rivers, but there was just too much. The top layer of the soil started turning very muddy, almost quicksand like, and parts of the hills started to slide. The creatures' village was the least affected by the landslides, being in the flat, slightly raised grounds deeper in the forest; it was surrounded by hills, but was not "below" the hills per se. Perhaps it was there because of the location's relative immunity to events like "the pouring." But the rest of the forest practically flowed down the hills, outward and away from the village, spreading as far as we could see out into the desert. The trees fell. The plants rolled into the mud. Where we had planted our gardens on the hillside, all the plants were just running down the hill. Just in case, the creatures and I took everything we could and ran out into the desert in the pouring rain. It was a good thing we had taken care to make sure our books were reasonably waterproof, and we had quite a large store of food and seeds.

We just camped out in the desert without much of a shelter. The creatures' fur was waterproof, so they didn't mind it so much; if they drank the rain water or fell into a river, of course, they would die instantly. With the few pieces of leather I managed to carry out, I built a large tent for myself and for my stuff. I invited them to join me, but they insisted that they preferred to be out in the rain. We watched helplessly as our whole world literally flowed away from us, mud, plants, and all.

It was a good thing that they stayed out and kept watch, for the desert floor itself started to give way. Apparently, those large, leathery desert animals lived underground in the desert, and they had dug elaborate tunnels to burrow in. The weight of the muddy hill flowing out into the desert, as

well as the increased flow of the underground rivers, started to weaken these tunnels, and they started to collapse. The leathery animals ran out screaming—in a low-pitched voice characteristic of all the animals of this world—and scattered in all directions. I had to move my tent several times, and we ended up almost at the edge of the desert.

Some of the creatures who had ventured all the way out to the valley told me that the mud was starting to cover the valley as well, flowing out with the river at first, but gradually the cliffy edges of the desert giving way from all the muddy water flowing through it. The soil of the desert was not muddy like in the forest, but almost like a concrete [or mortar], with large grains of sand bound together with some kind of chalky stuff. It appeared that it was also waterproof, but it couldn't take the weight of the sliding hillside with all the tunnels under it. Later I discovered that these tunnels in fact reached far into under the forest, and the concrete formed like the bedrock of the forest, and much of the forest floor also collapsed in the rain.

By the time the rain and the mudslides stopped, we were on a different world altogether. The hills of the forest were now almost all gone, and the creatures' village was now one of the highest points in the forest, their brick buildings still mostly standing, although noticeably slanted everywhere. My own "village" was still mostly there, but the buildings were almost all washed out; they were just a bunch of mud houses to begin with. The plants in the garden were still in their place, just parts of it overwhelmed by mud. Most of the creatures' plants were lost, however, except for the one-tree-per-house they had planted in their village. The smaller, separate village of the English-learners was completely washed out.

And the desert was almost all gone. It was no longer flat, and the rivers were running mostly over the desert, rather than underground, carving valleys in the mud and the concrete. The river carried more and more mud out into the desert and into the valley. The edges of the desert also washed out far into the valley, and no longer formed a cliff. The desert animals, their homes utterly destroyed, wandered aimlessly in the forest, in the desert, and in the valley. The valley animals, like those large cats, seemed unimpressed. They even ventured into the desert, apparently out of curiosity. Perhaps they, too, were confused and hungry.

The reconstruction of the village began in earnest within a day. The ground dried out quickly, as it always did, and it seemed that most of the plants that were washed down in the mud were still

alive, and the moisture seemed to give it a great boost for growing and spreading. Even seedlings started sprouting everywhere. The creatures and I agreed that we didn't have to build just in the old village; we could now plant all over where the desert used to be, and live all over the desert. (It didn't occur to me that the desert would soon turn back into a desert, but this actually never happened. Perhaps the desert animals' tunnels were helping keep the desert dry.)

Contrary to their previous discomfort with the idea, the creatures took to domesticating the desert animals. In their terrified state, the desert animals seemed to welcome this idea. Oddly, they let the animals live in their houses, and treated them like family, like they were pets rather than livestock. They used their leather, but not the meat, so perhaps they were more like horses to them. In the end, the desert animals all died out, save for a few who stayed living out in what was left of the desert. The creatures often brought them food.

Naturally, our supply of leather thus practically ended, but this was remedied in a couple of ways. First of all, I discovered that a lot of the grass fabric, which had gotten so fine and evenly woven that now it was almost like regular fabric in our world, had survived the rain. It turned out that if you bury the fabric in wet mud and leave it undisturbed, some kind of chemical reaction makes the fabric more durable, comparable to our cotton. It still got wet in the rain, but it didn't fall apart like it used to. This made sense since this was how the creatures used the wood from the trees. I experimented with different soil types, and, as I expected somewhat, the desert concrete was the best material to do this with. In fact, it seemed, that this was why the skin of the desert animals could be made into waterproof leather. One problem solved.

Furthermore, with all the exposed mud and fallen trees lying around, the creatures began a huge production of bricks to rebuild with. They really showed off how skilled they were as woodcutters—which they did with stone tools—and as a brick baker. I suggested using the desert soil as a building material, and they seemed to have suddenly discovered cement, as they were roasting away the desert soil to break it apart and mix it with water to use as mortar. Before, they had just stacked up the bricks that had toothed edges that locked onto each other. Now they could build their houses taller and sturdier, and their things didn't get wet as much in the rain.

Now that the tunnels of the desert animals had collapsed, we didn't have to worry about the stability of the soil, and the creatures soon learned to lay down a concrete slab to further stabilize and flatten out the land.

Within a year, everything was pretty much back to normal, with houses everywhere and with plants, wild and cultivated, covering all the places where the mud had spread. I feared that the rain would come back with the year, but from then on it was just the same drizzle-drizzle that we had always had. And, ironically, as the result of the "pouring," we lived more comfortably than we ever had, and we lacked in nothing.

The creatures also seemed to multiply in great numbers. In just a few years, there were more creatures than there ever had been, even by their account, and soon they would cover the whole land with their houses and gardens.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

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7.2 The Pouring

The Forest Creatures insisted that the Pouring was an accident; it was just rain that came. The Shore Creatures had many memories of big rains. The Valley Creatures had a memory of one big rain. The Forest Creatures and the Field Creatures, they had no memory of such a rain.

The Field Creatures, who came to live with the Valley Creatures after the Pouring, gave a memory of how the Pouring really came to be. In the Great One's other home, there are two kinds of creatures. Women, who multiply, and Men, who do not multiply, but are furry. Women have six legs, with two arms, two legs, and two arm stumps, and Men have five legs, with two arms, two legs, and one leg stump. Men waged great wars like the Shore Creatures did, and could destroy the whole world if they wanted to. More and more, the Women were fighting these great wars, too. Every time there was a war, many Men wanted to stop fighting, and more Women wanted to join the fight. The whole time, any one of them could destroy the whole world with this great weapon, which reminded them not to fight too hard, or they may just go and destroy the whole world. One day, one of the Men destroyed a Great City—with more Men and Women living in it than there are worms in this world—with just one blow of this great weapon, and from then on only a few of the Men and Women ever fought.

Now the memory is a little varied. Some Field Creatures said one of the Men then came to this world with this weapon, and tried to destroy the Forest and the Field. As this was a fiery weapon, the Great One stopped it with the great rain.

Some Field Creatures said that the Great One had called the Men to this world, to use the weapon, which was watery, not fiery, to destroy the Field Creatures' land, where not as many Field Creatures lived as there were worms in this world, but certainly there were many more Field Creatures than there were Forest Creatures. This was a punishment for their transgression against the Great One, and now the Forest Creatures took over the Field Creature's land, and many of the Field Creatures had no choice but to live with them, or to leave and live with the Valley Creatures.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that the rain was not called by the Great One, for there have been many more rains like the Pouring that have come to the Shore, and there have been rains like

the Pouring that have come since the Great One left.

Anyway, during the Pouring, it rained for over a month as it had never rained in the Forest before, or so said the Forest creatures. The truth is, their memory was confused by all the 'lala fruits they ate, and when their memory was put to words, they lost all truth, and so they did not know their own memory. The Field Creatures knew, however, that such a rain could come, and that the Forest Creatures had once had a memory of the One God teaching the Forest Creatures how to be safe from the rain. The One God had created the Forest on top of the Field Creatures' houses, and built the hills to protect them from the eight-legged demons. The Field Creatures were taught to keep their village in the middle of the forest; away from the hills. They were taught to dry the driest mud with fire, and make bricks and vats to build their houses and keep their food. They were taught to lay down the spit traps to keep the mud dry. They were taught to leave the trees be, and keep the Field Creatures from eating their roots, for they keep the mud from flowing.

The Field Creatures did not believe in the One God, or any god for that matter, and so they thought this was just a silly story the Forest Creatures memoried because of all the 'lala fruits they ate, or maybe this was the Forest Creatures' way to memory their ways, except it was now lost in their memories. Because the Field Creatures had built their houses over the rivers, they had no use for stories about how to keep safe from the rain, for the rain never fell on them, or to keep their foods, for the fish came with the river, and now the Forest Creatures brought them fruits in exchange for leather.

But after the Screams, the Field Creatures began to fear the Great One, who might or might not be from the One God, and who might or might not be an eight-legged demon, for she was terrifying to the Field Creatures, however silly the Forest Creatures may be. When the Screams stopped, they thought maybe they were forgiven.

Then the rain began, and would not stop.

At first, it seemed that it was a punishment for the Forest Creatures for having lost their ways. They no longer laid out spit traps, so the soil turned to mud. They had cut down their trees, so the mud began to flow. At first, it seemed that their village, bricks and vats or no bricks and vats, were lost forever, as the mountains flowed like river everywhere. The Nameless Ones lost their village very quickly, and they ran out of the forest in fear, along with the Great One. The sight of the

Great One running out, carrying her leather, and with no fruits or plants that she kept, was at first a great relief to the Field Creatures. It seemed that she, too, was afraid of the rain. She, too, was being punished.

Then the most horrible thing happened. The rain and the mud poured into the Field, and it made the walls of the Field Creatures' houses wet. For as long as the months ran with the years, the Field Creatures' houses never let the rain in, and the Field Creatures never got wet from rain or feared rain. But the mud made the walls crack, and the walls crumbled from the cracks, and more mud flowed in through the walls that made more cracks. Even the rivers began to turn muddy and big, and started to push on the walls and made them crack and crumble from the cracks.

The Field Creatures fled in terror, running like no Forest Creature ever ran. They lost their children. They lost their foods. They lost their beautiful vats that they had traded from the Shore Creatures. They lost everything but their skin. Many Field Creatures died in their houses.

They watched as their houses crumbled under the mud and as their walls flowed out into the Valley, where mud and the walls covered the Valley, too. The Valley Creatures, who had not expected any of this, also ran in terror, and watched from their hills, which were not muddy and so did not flow, as their rivers flowed with mud and with walls and covered everything.

The mud and the walls came to the Shore Creatures, who got the rain but not the horror, and only found out later what had happened.

When the rain stopped, the whole Field was gone, but a little corner where the sun shines more brightly and so the walls were stronger. There was mud everywhere. The whole of the field had become the forest, and the forest plants they grew everywhere, like a plague of worms.

The Forest Creatures welcomed the Field Creatures into their homes, but the Field Creatures did not live long, for they did not want to join the Forest Creatures. They laid Forest Creature children, and one by one died of broken tongues. The Forest Creatures were saddened by the loss of the Field Creatures and their trades, and crumbled their bodies as they did for their own siblings. A few Field Creatures stayed living in what was left of the Field, but they were no longer the proud Creatures they once were. They lived in shame, for their transgression had cost them their world. It would take them until the months ran with the years again to rebuild the walls of the houses to their liking, and they continued to trade with the Forest Creatures, but they had little leather to give, and

the Forest Creatures didn't need as much leather, and the Great One stopped using leather after the Pouring, so the Forest Creatures gave them fruits just for not eating the roots, as was always the trade, and as was always the way of the Field Creatures.

The Valley Creatures were of two minds. Because they lived as the Forest Creatures did, and looked much like the Forest Creatures, some thought it was best to go live with the Forest Creatures, for now it seemed there was more Forest than ever, and a lot of the Valley was lost to the mud and the walls. They just didn't think they could keep living in the Valley in their way, and they also feared what the Great One would do next to make them obey. So they joined the Forest Creatures in many numbers.

The Valley Creatures who remained liked their ways, and made the best of what they had. The Forest Creatures still needed the poop of the cats, and even more than ever because they had so much plants and so many Creatures living with them, so the Valley Creatures made good trade with the Forest Creatures. The Forest Creatures, they needed so much poop, they even started taking the poop of Valley animals that were not so big as the cats, and this made the Valley Creatures happy, for they could start growing their mushrooms again, although not as much as before.

So the Valley Creatures considered the Pouring a blessing, for they believed in the Many Gods, who taught them Many Ways, and perhaps the Great One came from one of the Many Gods after all, they thought.

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Updated 11/1/11

8.1 The City

During the "pouring," a lot of the trees were gone, and took a while to grow back. So the plants were getting a lot more sun, and it seemed we didn't need as much fertilizer for each plant, but they now needed to be watered, since the soil dried off more quickly, and there were a lot more of these plants we were growing, especially with the invention of waterproof grass fabric. My creatures finally caught on that any poop would do for fertilizer, so they started collecting their own poop, which improved the sanitation around the villages, and traded our produce for many different kinds of poop from the other creatures. We dug irrigation channels, at first somewhat haphazardly, but more and more with some planning. Now there were a lot more rivers, but each river didn't flow as much as they used to, so it took careful thought to make sure there was enough water for every plant. Fortunately, all it took was for the ditches to flow near the plants, and the plants did what they had to do to get the water they needed. Unfortunately, clean water is poisonous to the creatures, so we had to build bridges and such to help them avoid it as much as possible. Still, accidents happened a lot.

So it was decided that we should have two different kinds of villages, one for farming, and one for doing other stuff that didn't require all that water flowing through ditches. We ended up building just one dry village, which we decided to call "the city," which became a good name since soon it grew into a real-life city with concrete-paved streets, tall houses, each with a plant outside for a small "garden," and even a sewage system, where the poop collected and washed out to the farms every time it rained.

Would you believe that it took me this long to finally invent the wheel for them? It just never occurred to me... partly because they were already so skilled in so many things, something as basic as a wheel was not something I thought I had to invent for them. With the city growing, it no longer did for the creatures to carry all their stuff around, although they were very strong and did pretty well. We needed wheel barrows and carts and all sorts of equipment like that to keep the city growing. So I showed a few of the creatures who were especially good with the stones how to make wheels... I'm embarrassed to say that I really didn't know how to make a good wheel, just how it

should be shaped, and they couldn't figure it out, either, so mostly they were made from slices of large trees, trimmed to make the edges smooth. It was quite a wasteful process, as they had to chip away at least as much wood as the wheel itself for every wheel. But, the product was quite satisfactory; that is, once the wheels were soaked and treated with mud to make them waterproof. I also got them to catch the fish for their oil, and use the oil to waterproof all the wood equipment we made; this did not work so well, as something in the rain water seemed to wash the oil off. These carts were not so sturdy, so they could not be used for trades, but they were quite convenient for use in the city and between the city and the farming villages, where the roads were smooth.

Would you also believe that these creatures didn't have names? When they started writing down their own history, I noticed that they wrote things as if things just happened without anyone doing them. I started asking them who did what, and they just shrugged like it was unimportant. When they started the judging business, however, it became more and more necessary to keep the records with some kind of notation on who was what, since it all became meaningless otherwise. Now that different creatures were doing different things, it also became more necessary to keep track of who was doing what and when and how.

As the city grew, and the population multiplied, we also needed to keep track of their families, so they started coming up with family names. They had sort of an inheritance system, but it was rather sketchy like the foot-stomping business. Now they could keep track of what belonged to which family, although this was tricky because they didn't marry, and started a new family every time they bred. Eventually we settled into a system we liked, where each household was renamed every time a family was started, since the family name only needed to be kept for two generations or so. That way, everyone knew when and where they were born, and which houses they could claim for starting a new family.

For most of the time that the city was being built, I stayed in many different places. Mostly, I stayed wherever the action was, living out of the tent that proved so useful during the “pouring.” Once the city settled down I moved back to my old village—which was only half buried but where all the buildings were washed out—where the creatures had built me a new house. They wanted to build me like a palace in the middle of the city, actually as a part of the main judging building, since I was spending a lot of time with the judges, but I really didn't think it was appropriate for me to

keep telling them what to do, and they had to really make up their own minds about things, you know? So I made myself as scarce as I could, and, even though the city was growing and growing basically according to what I suggested, I thought it was their skills and smarts that made it all happen as fast and as well as it did. I just made suggestions and came up with new ideas. So I asked for the same hut that I had had before, just made of better bricks this time, and I went back to a life of farming and occasionally talking with the creatures who came to visit.

Actually, I started telling them stories. All the stories I grew up with... fairy tales, books, Dr. Seuss, you name it. I even told them some Bible stories, although I wasn't really raised religious, because they seemed very religious, and they wanted more and more stories, so I started telling them all the stories I knew. They loved every bit of them, and wrote them all down. I even asked them to start writing stories of their own, since so far they had only written down their histories that they had only kept in memory. They had a hard time being creative, however. A few of them tried, but most of what they could produce were differently phrased versions of the same stories they had already had. So I settled on creative paraphrasing. This they loved to do, and we even held contests to see who could say things in the most beautiful, memorable way. It's lovely how the same story that you've heard the exact same way over and over and over for all your life can suddenly become an entirely different story just because things are worded differently. I think they enjoyed that, too.

They were becoming English-speaking poets. Rhyming was their favorite thing to do, almost like it was a game. Their language didn't really have rhymes, perhaps because all the vowels were so similar, and their grammar had a lot of word endings [declensions] that sounded the same or very similar to one another. They were expert at rhythms [meters], which was used a lot in their poetry, and became experts at that in English, too. I told them, of course, that some poems in English don't have rhymes or rhythms, and they found this quite incredible. I couldn't remember any prose poems, so I told them the Lord's Prayer, which I didn't know quite thoroughly, and they were fascinated by it. I couldn't really explain what all the words meant, so their curiosity was not fully met, but I managed to get across to them that poems do not have to have rhyme or rhythms to be beautiful or moving.

I found it odd that they felt so uncomfortable with made-up stories, and that they stuck to certain ways of writing poetry, which was used only for remembering things. They spoke freely when they were speaking, but with poetry they always stuck to the set patterns of rhythms. I guess I

changed that for them, at least when they were speaking English. Actually, since they always thought of English as my language rather than something that they spoke every day, it makes sense that they'd accept that English would have such different rules.

Once I started living in the forest mostly on my own, farther away from where most of the creatures lived, I could explore the forest even more, especially ruins of old villages scattered here and there in the forest. Even their old village was not all built back up, so I could poke around the fallen houses to see just how these creatures lived.

Nothing remarkable in the way the houses were built. Mostly they just had a single room. They always went to poop (they never peed) outside in designated, shared places, now plumbed with canals at my suggestion, so there was no bathroom in the house. They didn't cook their food, I think because the fruits were already so dry and the water was poisonous to them, so there was no kitchen. So, just a room where everybody slept and worked. Some of the larger houses had a separate room for doing different kinds of work. Houses that made a lot of vats and such had a separate hut outside that was used as a kiln, and a lot of the creatures, in fact, did their vat work outside.

One thing that I discovered in some of the houses, which I found interesting, was little pieces of glass. Apparently, these were broken bits of vats. They were smaller than the vats they made, and always came with a small lid [stopper], so it made a nice little almost-water-tight container. I think they kept special things in them, maybe the spice fruits or other kinds of jewelry maybe. They were always elaborately colored, and in patterns very different from the vats or the bricks. I asked them who made these glass things, and they said they trade for them by the sea... this was the first time they mentioned anything about the sea. They said they came from the creatures that also produced the spice fruit, but now that our farms could grow all that we needed, we didn't trade with these tribes any more, and so no more glass. They showed me some of the glass items that they still had around their houses, and every one was different, beautiful in its own special way. I thought maybe I should go visit these creatures someday, but oddly I never got the chance. They seemed like the creative types, as compared to my tribe which was very set in their ways. I hadn't thought about this while I was there, but I should have asked why they were always eager to change their habits at my suggestion, considering how much they relied on habit and

tradition, allowing only gradual changes rather than great spurts of creativity.

The other thing I discovered was metals. I think it was aluminum, but it may have been a mixture of different things. I found little knobby slivers of shiny, silvery metal in some of the ruins where they used to have kilns for vats. It turned out that the elaborate process of making vats produced a lot of this stuff, mostly flowing out of the lower quality mud that they used for making vats. After the "pouring", we had access to much better quality mud everywhere, so they weren't left with as much of this stuff any more. So, I gathered a few of the creatures, and went about the kilns in the village and the city and the ruins, digging through what seemed like centuries of ashes to see how much of the metal we could find. Once we collected quite a lot, I worked with some of the vat makers to find a way to mold these into useful things. Now, the thing is, the way they lived, there were very few things that they used as tools. They had stone tools for cutting wood, and they had vats for carrying things, and now they had wheels, and that was about it. They had been using the same stone tools for building their city, and they did it very well. They didn't need utensils for cooking or eating food. They didn't need fishing rods or barbecues or anything we would think of as tools. So, I don't know why, I made a spear point. It just seemed like an easy thing to make, and I had played with plastic ones as a kid, so it just occurred to me that they didn't have anything like that, so why not? I hadn't really noticed that they didn't have any weapons to speak of, other than stock piles here and there of worn out stone tools that they could throw, and this was the first time that they had a real-live weapon. At any rate, they were entranced by the hot, molten metal and the ease with which it could be molded into shape, and soon we were producing aluminum vats and aluminum wheels and axles. The metal was not that strong, and seemed to wear out about as quickly as wood, so this didn't really change anything in the way they lived. The metal was not that useful as a tool because it was soft. It was just another way of making things that were useful. The aluminum things were also pretty, as it never rusted.

I did think of making a stockpile of spear points, which they learned to throw like they threw worn-out stone tools. Just in case. They did say the glass makers could be quite fierce when they were angry, and from what they say they had lots of wars where they threw pieces of glass at one another. It seemed my creatures were afraid of this tribe of creatures, and often practiced defending themselves against an attack. As far as anyone knew, however, such an attack had never taken place.

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8.2 The City

After the Pouring, the Forest Creatures' way of life began to change in a big way. There were many changes before the Pouring, but these were small compared to the changes after the Pouring. For one, they abandoned their village, turning it into mud and gardens. They moved out to what used to be the Field, and built new villages, all lined up, with great canals where deadly water flowed and with lines and lines of plants. The greatest village, the City, at first was for the Nameless Ones alone, and, for they had many children and did not work as hard, they had become the greatest and the most numerous of the clans. Soon, all clans came to live in the city.

The City was not like anything any of the Creatures had ever built. It was not just a village, where Creatures lived with Creatures and Creatures spent time doing their work and Creatures ate and Creatures slept. It was a village full of walls and houses made of bricks that were held together with Field sand that had held down the river for as many times of months running with the years as anyone can count. Now the Field sand held up the walls of the houses in the City, walls after walls after walls, all in a row, all in a line. Flood of water came with every rain to wash down the streets. Everything the Forest Creatures ever wanted to rid were washed into the Valley, where it clogged the rivers and buried the fish and washed out the trees with filth. Shards of vattery. Food scraps and unhatched seeds. Poop. They came with every rain and buried the Valley, much by much. And still the City stood.

And now all trade took place in the City. No longer did the Forest Creatures come to the Field to trade, for the Field Creatures had all laid Forest Creatures children and died, and only a few remained who had very little leather to give. No longer did the Forest Creatures come to the Valley to trade, for the Valley Creatures were happy to bring their poop to the City. No longer did the Forest Creatures come to the Shore, for the Forest Creatures wanted nothing to do with the Shore Creatures any more, although the Shore Creatures came from time to time for some vats.

More and more of the Valley Creatures came to live in the City, and learned the words, and learned the way of the City. More and more of the Valley Creatures came to live in the Forest Creatures' other villages, and learned their memories, and ate their 'lala fruits to their heart's

content, and shrugged their feet as their own memories faded away.

More and more of the Forest Creatures, then, came out of the City and their villages to look for more land to put their plants. They carried their plants in barrels with wheels, and traveled far to plant them in any plot of land they could find. Then they would start villages, just like the ones they have in Forests, even where there were other Creatures already living there. The Valley Creatures were already weak from all the filth from the City flowing out to their rivers, and the Forest Creatures came to live with them.

Mostly, tho, they lived where no Creature had ever lived before. Some of these Forest Creatures moving out of the City and the villages were Nameless Ones, some even judges, and they taught the words to every Creature who wanted to become a Nameless One. They did not allow Forest Creatures of other clans become a Nameless One. They did not allow other Creatures to become a Nameless One if they had already picked another clan. The others, though, they welcomed, and the number of the Nameless Ones became very big.

And just as the Forest Creatures and Valley Creatures were losing their memories in their 'lala fruits, the Great One taught them the art of Creation, the art of lies, the art of untruth. The Great One started telling the Nameless Ones memories of things that no Forest Creature or Valley Creature had ever heard of before. Ancient Creatures. Far away Cities. More Great Ones and evil beings in great battles and in great friendship. Trades. Comings and goings. Rivers. Creatures that live in the air. None of these were like anything in the memories. The Great Ones told them that these were not memories, but lies. Untruth. And they must be put to words, just as only memories had been.

Even the most devoted of the Nameless Ones were afraid of this idea. Even before there was the One God, even their smaller and smaller memories told them, there were the memories. The memories were not just the way of the Forest Creatures. It was the way of all Creatures. Every Creature lived by the memories because they were true.

It had made some of the Forest Creatures afraid that they were losing their memories because of the 'lala fruits that they loved, that the Great One had made from the dirt for them. They thought the words would help them remember, so they were not afraid any more.

It had made some of the Forest Creatures afraid that they were losing their memories

because of the judges that they served, that the Great One had picked for them among the Nameless Ones, the users of word. They thought the judges would help them remember by choosing the right words, so they were not afraid any more.

The judges and the words, they had been the gift from the One God for keeping the memories true. If they had lies in them, it was because the Forest Creatures already had bad memories. If they had lies in them, it was because the judges chose wrong.

Now the words lived to put lies to memory.

The Great One talked them in with jollies and follies, speaking words with endings and words with ticks and ups and downs that made the words seem happier when put to lies. And the Forest Creatures enjoyed music, and enjoyed turning words into music, and so they began speaking lies of their own in words, and began writing down the lies in words.

And then, the Nameless Ones learned the Final Poem, the words without tick and ups and downs, with no fun and no reason. Nonsense. Complete lies that did not make any meaning, but lived to be fun, and have no use. Words did not have to have meaning.

Many of the stories without sense are now all lost. All burned with the Blamas leather on which they were written, but one is still in our memory, even if it is in words, as the Forest Creatures used to teach all other Creatures who were learning the words. It is like this:

The fatter, whose art is heated,
hollow be the name,
the City came, the will was done,
in the sky, as it is in the dirt.
Four gave us our tresses,
as others have given them the past.
Leave us not in the tent nation,
but the liver is for our evils.

This story is told with a story that the Great One said she didn't know what the words meant, and it didn't matter what they meant, for it was beautiful for being without endings or ticks or ups and downs that made sense. It really didn't matter to the Great One also that the words be

changed in telling this story. Soon, all the stories told by the Nameless Ones were different every time it was told.

It is in words, and so it is not true, that the Great One was one day looking at the stoves where the Forest Creatures made their vats. She became angry and began speaking even louder than she always did. She called the vat makers, to whom she never had spoken, and told them to dig through their garbage, and to find all the Metal that the vat makers had thrown away for many times as long as the months ran with the years, as the One God had taught them to do. She said that they were wrong to think that the One God had told them to throw them away, or to let it wash down to the Valley in the rain, for these were meant for vats, not the mud they had been using. The Great One taught them how to make vats out of the Metal, but the Forest Creatures did not know how to make Metal without making vats, so they kept making vats in the old way, collected the Metal, and made even more vats out of Metal. They traded their old mud vats as fast as they could, so they could be left only with Metal vats, but many of the Forest Creatures liked the old mud vats, and other Creatures did not need that many of them, so the Forest Creatures always had many more vats than they could use. Nameless Ones always used the old vats, and never used Metal. The Nameless Ones always made all Forest Creatures stop the old ways, but they always held on to the old ways, except that they always used the words.

So, instead of vats, the Great One made the Forest Creatures make sticks and stones out of the Metal, and the Forest Creatures kept them in piles, useless except in war, like the Shore Creatures did. This was the first time the Forest Creatures kept weapons ready for war. No one had started a war with the Forest Creatures. No memory from the Shore Creatures, Valley Creatures, Forest Creatures, or Field Creatures ever mention any Creature coming to the Forest for war. The Shore Creatures had many wars, and they used their vats for chasing each other away for as long as memories go, many months running with many years. Never did they once bring their wars to the Forest.

But the Great One told the Forest Creatures to gather the Metal and prepare for War. This was the first of the weapons. It was the first weapon not made from vats of the Shore Creatures.

Then she left the Forest Creatures.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

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9.1 The Departure

You know how in these stories... I had read a few before getting to that world, and have actually read quite a few more since I've been back... that children read, fantasies, science fiction, whatever, the children arrive at some strange world through a mysterious gateway, and they meet creatures that already speak English, where everything speaks English, even the desk lamps and icicles, and then they go on some mission where they go fetch something or deliver something or go to school and learn how to destroy the source of evil or rescue the source of good, riding in a magical car or animal or flying carpet, with a beautiful princess as a companion or a talking clock or something...

Well, my life with the creatures didn't really turn out that way. It was exciting and eventful at times, but mostly it was just boring. It took years for them to learn enough English to speak to me comfortably, and I never did learn their language that well. No one asked me to go on a great quest to save their planet. All I did was tell them where to plant the trees and invent the wheel. No great sorcerers demanding my sacrifice for peace. No great warriors bashing down the walls of my castle. No magic whatsoever. All very ordinary, and boring.

One day, an argument broke out among my closest friends. One of them, who had the most beautiful handwriting, was arguing with a very young creature. Apparently, they were writing something down, and they had a disagreement about a number. It turned out that they were trying to figure out how long I had been there. This was something I had not really thought about except in a vague way. The younger one thought that I had been there for as long as the months had run with the years, or 25 years. He cited memories that he learned from his raisers, who were all memory keepers. They were really old and somewhat senile when it was born, but they insisted that the date was right; 7 days of the month and 322 days of the year. The raisers remembered this date because they thought it great that $3 + 2 + 2$ was 7, and 7 was the highest one-digit number. 7 is the number of ultimate good, as it shields the world from 8, the number of ultimate evil, the number of fullness and therefore finality. And this was indeed the date this day. The older one said this was nonsense

and they had no recollection of such a mathematical coincidence in anyone's memory or anyone's written record, and they had in fact been counting the days I had been there, and there were about two more years to go before it had been as long as the months ran with the year.

As they were on the verge of having a real fight—which hardly occurred now that we had judges to settle things like this—I had to get involved. I asked them to tell me their evidences, which made little sense to me, and I could not really decide who was right from any of the ways in which I was keeping track of my height or days there or whatever... since I wasn't really doing it systematically. I knew approximately how old I was, but I could've easily been off by two or more years. So I asked to see the way the older one had kept track of the number of days I had been there. Of course, this one was not alive when this record first started. It was already a fourth or fifth generation creature to have been doing this. It was a descendent of one of the first ones to seriously learn English, all of whom were dead. It showed me pages after pages after pages of stick figures they had drawn on pieces of fabric, grouped in eights, and eights of eights, then eights of eights of eights. I added it up and indeed it was what it was. However, I realized that they could not have kept track of all these days before I had taught them how to write, since they never wrote anything on fabric or leather until that serious day in the *plasa*, or perhaps a few months after that.

So I proposed a compromise. What if we just said that we don't know any more when exactly I came, or that it doesn't matter, but that we do know how long I've been here since it's been seriously kept track of. If it means anything to anyone, we'll just say that when this record was started was the first year of my life here, since until then I wasn't even allowed to see the village, and this was the first year that I really felt that I belonged to the village.

This seemed agreeable to all concerned. We did, of course, make a note in the records that some memory keepers have said that I arrived on the 7 days of the month and 322 days of the year, which put us two years or so before the "official" day of my "arrival."

This got me thinking, however. Apparently I had been there longer than any of these creatures had ever lived and longer than any of their native ways of keeping track of history could keep track of history. I had been there a long time, and I was probably somewhere in my late 20s. It seemed that it was time for me to venture out farther than the world that these Creatures knew, and seriously explore this world. See what awaits beyond the horizon. Over the rainbow. Really, how

bad could it be? I was really bored out of my mind, and even the risks of danger seemed not so bad.

The more I thought about this, of course, the more difficult the decision became. The main problem was where to go. The forest used to be the limits of my world, and the field used to be the world outside. Now the field was just another part of our growing network of villages, buried under the mud that flowed down from the forest during the Pouring. The valley, of course, lay beyond the field, but that seemed like more of the same, populated by more of my creatures, maybe some other tribes of creatures who did not know me and did not know English and I would have to teach them everything all over again... maybe they didn't even speak the same language, so I would have to learn yet another difficult language. The ocean, which lay beyond the valley, and apparently surrounded our land mass on three sides, seemed like something different, but then the shoreline was populated by creatures who liked to throw pieces of glass to attack each other. Not my kind of folks.

So I decided to go to the one place where no creature ever seemed to have gone: the far away place we called the outlay. I had no idea which way was up in this world, but I started imagining the outlay as the great forbidding North, where the climate was too cold for the creatures, accustomed to year-round warmish, comfortable weather with occasional rain and infrequent hurricanes. It helped that there was a great forbidding mountain range, complete with snow-covered peaks, which stood between our part of the world and the outlay. I was intrigued by the insects, the mammal-like grasshoppers, that came in great numbers to have babies in our part of the world. The creatures thought that they ate "fatty things," probably fish, in the outlay. What kind of world could this be? The insects were certainly tame; they were strong, but never attacked anyone, and were very calm when caught, almost as if they understood that we were going to eat them and there was no point in trying to resist. In this world, even the gentlest of cats puts up a huge fight if it thinks it's in danger. So it must be that these insects knew nothing of danger, I figured, and so their world must be just as peaceful as ours. Maybe just as boring, but at least it will be different, and I could come back any time. Maybe it would be too cold there; maybe the fishes there are fatty because they needed a layer of fat to survive. Or, maybe it was temperate, with seasons, like I had been used to, and maybe I'd feel less bored and could keep better track of time.

I wanted to find out.

Packing was the easy part, partly because it was the impossibly hard part. Seeing that I didn't know the exact or even vague distance to anything, or what things were like on the other side of the mountains, and that I had no idea what the trek through the mountains would be like, it was pointless to try to pack for it. I just packed as much of the fruits as I could comfortably carry; being generally bone dry, they were quite light to travel with, and I could easily carry months' worth of fruits. Water wouldn't be a problem with all that snow, I figured, and I could make a point of traveling along rivers. In a pinch, I could even try to catch a few insects. Getting enough leather collected together for tents, sleeping bags, backpacks, and warm clothes and shoes and such was the tricky part, but we managed. Aluminum came in handy for a lot of the hardware, including spiked snow shoes. I didn't want to carry any vats, because they were breakable and on the heavy side. I just packed a few aluminum implements for drinking water and such. So the plan was to go as far as I could with about half of the provisions, and to start heading back as soon as the going got tough. No problem.

The really hard part was talking the creatures out of following me. They really, really, really insisted on following me, the whole lot of them. I tried to explain that this was not some important journey, just a vacation trip out of curiosity, for fun, no meaning or no new discoveries or new eras or nothing. Just a vacation, which could have absolutely no meaning to them. They thought that they were totally entitled to come along, or obliged, or something. Eventually, I told them to pick about a dozen among them, and they could help me carry some of the stuff to the edge of the ice, and after that they had to come back. I promised over and over that I would return, and return soon, and finally they agreed to my plan.

I just didn't think they could make it across the mountains, and I really had no idea they were so attached to me, or thought of me as such an important part of their lives. So I made an important change to my plan; I will go, scout it out, and return as soon as I have a sense of what things are like, then return. Probably a year, at most two years. I could always go back there, or not, after that, to relieve my boredom. I certainly felt like I was a part of this tribe of creatures, and I was so proud to be a part of what they had achieved. I didn't think I really could bear to leave them for too long, anyway. I was glad to change my plans so I had a mission; I will go and see what's there in the outlay, rather than wander aimlessly in yet another unfamiliar land.

Maybe next time they could go with me. I figured that a part of my mission was to find out

if they could go with me, and that seemed to make them happier.

We arrived at the foot of the mountains much later than I had thought, almost three months, or three weeks of our time. Even though for the first couple of months we were traveling past many villages of the creatures, we were living mostly off the wild fruits the whole trip. It was clear that there was no way I would have made it across the mountains with just what I was carrying. If the creatures hadn't followed me along and were helping me find more fruits, I would have eaten up quite a bit of my packed goods. As we approached the mountains, as I expected, the fruits were getting scarcer, and there were more unfamiliar plants, and so feeding ourselves became more and more difficult.

What I was absolutely right about was the fact that the creatures would not have been able to make it across the mountains with me. On the seventh night on the mountain, two of the creatures died in the night. Even though the tent kept me warm enough in the night, and the leather proved to be an excellent insulator, the air was much too cold and moist for them, and they just died in their sleep, peacefully, but leaving us very, very saddened. I basically commanded the rest to return, and they obliged. We crumbled the dead friends' bodies on a hillside as soon as they dried, which took a day or so longer than back up, and we said our goodbyes. I waved until they disappeared from view.

It took me maybe another half a month to reach the snow line. I was aiming for a gap between what seemed to be the lowest of the peaks, toward the middle of the mountain range. The valley leading up to the gap was an easy climb, with a creek flowing down the whole length. As I reached the gap, I could finally see the mountain peaks beyond the mountain peaks I had been watching, and it seemed like there were hundreds and hundreds of peaks, almost all of them just as high as the highest peaks we could see from the foothills, and some of them even higher. This was proving to be quite a challenge, I thought. I even got a little depressed, as it seemed like maybe I wouldn't make it, and I thought of the two creatures who died. Maybe I had no choice but to go back, and then their death would have been completely pointless.

I got a little sick, too, probably more like from the height of the mountains rather than any kind of a bug, but I needed to take a three-day off from climbing.

While I rested, I thought about what trouble might be ahead, and finally decided to keep

moving ahead, as I had originally planned, until I reached a point where I had to turn back in order to make it back. I estimated that I had a good two more months of trekking before this would happen. This was a happy thought to me, and I was well enough the next day to keep on. And I felt great.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

9.2 The Dispute

Among the Shore Creatures lived a Creature, now known as Pakssim, which in the Shore Creatures' language means the first to do, who of course had no name then and did not have a name its whole life. It was reputed that its raisers were all children of Forest Creatures, or children of children of Forest Creatures, or some such, although it was never easy to know these things for sure, for memories hardly kept track of who were children of whom. This was remarked upon on this particular Creature only because it had a habit of adoring 'lala fruits, unlike most of the other Shore Creatures, or so they claimed.

One day, Pakssim got into a dispute with a neighbor. Soon the whole village got involved, and the dispute reached a point where a war was almost declared, and, you know Shore Creatures, once it reaches a point where a war is almost declared it becomes impossible to know what the dispute originally was all about. This is why Shore Creature memories tell of many, many wars, and how glorious and dangerous they were, but never why these wars were waged. This is also why Shore Creatures never waged wars against other Creatures, since all the other Creatures were very much interested in memorying the whys, and talk endlessly about them, and it took the fun out of wars for the Shore Creatures.

Now, just as the Shore Creatures began their customary month of preparation for the war, a group of traders returned from the City of the Forest Creatures, and they had to pick the sides. Most of them had no trouble picking a side, for it really didn't matter which side they took, war was war, but three in particular had some trouble deciding. By the end of the month, two of them had decided, but one still remained. This meant that one of the two warring parties would have to just kill it, and sacrifice one of its own as a price, but neither was really interested in killing this particular Creature. So, as it happened sometimes, the leaders of the two parties, Pakssim and some other, came to see this Creature to make it chose its side.

Now, generally, in such a meeting, the leaders would try to convince the leftover Creature to join it by demonstrating that its side was surely going to be victorious. Many Shore Creatures would lose their lives in the war, and all the dead would be honored, but only one side would be

declared the winner, and there was no fun or glory in being in the losing side. The more losses you had in your life, the less you were allowed to do. So, no matter how good a fighter a Creature was, it was important to pick the side that was going to win.

The leaders, especially Pakssim, was shocked to then find themselves being asked to explain the whys.

The why? bellowed Pakssim. The why does not matter. Who will win is all that matters. What is this nonsense? And it stormed out without even waiting for an answer.

The other leader was more confused than angry, and after sorting itself out, could manage to explain to the leftover, Nobody knows any more, and nobody ever really knows the why, and how does it matter anyway?

The leftover explained that it would feel more comfortable picking the side that was right than the side that was going to win. It was quite important that it knew the why.

So the other leader told the leftover that it would find out, and began to ask around, in both sides of the war. As it had expected, no one knew for sure, if anything at all. But, a few of the Creatures remembered something having to do with 'lala fruits. It seemed that the dispute was originally about something completely different, probably having to do with a memory, but it became a war when someone accused Pakssim of having bad memory because of all the 'lala fruit it ate.

This sounded familiar to the other leader, so it asked Pakssim whether this sounded like a good memory. Pakssim still didn't see the point of all this, but it agreed that it sounded familiar.

So all this was told to the leftover, and the leftover picked the other side, seeing that Pakssim was well known as an eater of 'lala fruits, so if any kind of memory was involved, it was most likely wrong.

So the war began, and Pakssim's side quickly won when the other leader died. More Shore Creatures than ever had died for such a short war, so say the Shore Creature memories, but their memories always say that about every war. The words are not the only lies. The leftover also died.

Yet, rather than being happy from the victory, Pakssim became thinking. It came to the crumbling of the bodies, and it happened on the turn to crumble the leftover's body over the ocean, taking care to take out the pieces of vats buried in its skin. Instead of returning the pieces to the vat

stores, Pakssim took it home, and placed it by its bed, and thought about it every night.

The leftover wanted to know the why of the war, and wanted to know whose claim was right. All wars were fought over an important claim, and over whose claim was right, but no one ever thought to actually pick a side over whose claim was right. It was unimportant. Did not matter. All claims were right, and all claims were wrong, and the winner won the claim.

But what if, what if the wars were decided by who was right?

What if the wars did not have to be fought, and the dispute was decided by who was right?

The two traders who had decided before the leftover had both picked the other side, so they were living in shame. Pakssim would never have visited them, but it did. It wanted to know why they also waited to pick. They told Pakssim that they could not pick because of the same reason; they wanted to know the why. But, they decided to just pick anyway, and so they picked the other side because they thought the other side would win.

Pakssim asked them why they wanted to know the why.

They said it was from dealing with the Forest Creatures. The Forest Creatures, especially the Nameless Ones, were always talking and asking and arguing about the why, and the right, and things like that. Never was there a conversation without talking, and talking, and talking about the why and the right. They had Judges, didn't we all know, who spent the whole day just talking about the why and the right, and nothing else, and they only spoke in words, because the words helped everyone decide the right and the why, and because the words helped them keep memories. The traders thought this was all very silly, and thought things had been better when Forest Creatures decided by stomping their feet, because then they could just know what was right, even though they never enjoyed the glories of war. They had decided by winning. Now they decided by talking and talking and talking.

Pakssim agreed with them that this was all silly, but then it became curious. It had never traveled to the Forest, and had never seen the City. Now that it won the war, there was much glory with it, and it could do whatever it wanted. So it decided to see the City. It took the two traders with it.

To Pakssim the lined up walls of the City was a beautiful and scary view. Just the fact that

everything was ordered, lined up, done the way... that everything and everything was just done the way over and over and always completely blew its mind. It was awesome. It was crazy. It was just not possible. Yet it was.

This was so different from the lives of the Shore Creatures, who worked hard, lived hard, played hard, and warred hard, but always never told one another what to do. The City was all about telling what to do. The Forest Creatures roamed the streets of the City in just the way they were told to do, went where they were told to go, ate when they were told to eat, moved things when they were told to move them.

And they spoke in a screech all the time that hurt Pakssim's ears. The words. They only spoke to each other in the words. Pakssim did not know the language of the Forest Creatures, but it knew that it sounded a lot like the Shore Creature's language, because many Forest Creatures came to live with the Shore Creatures and lay Shore Creature children. The City did not speak the language of the Forest Creatures. Pakssim knew just a few trading signs, but trading signs were useless in the City.

Soon the three of them were confronted by a Nameless One who seemed very important and wanted to know why they were there even though it was not a trading day. One of the traders told the Nameless One, in trading signs, that Pakssim was here to see the City, and maybe learn the way of the Forest Creatures. The Nameless One told Pakssim, through the trader, in trading signs, that it would have to pick a clan. Pakssim didn't know what this meant, and it didn't know that the trader had told the Nameless One that it wanted to learn the way of the Forest Creatures, because it did not. It did not want to learn anything, and it did not want anything. The City was just too much. It wanted to go back home.

The trader explained to Pakssim that it needed to become a Nameless One if it wanted to become a word `user.

Pakssim could not think. Pakssim wanted to come home, and so they did.

For months and months, Pakssim could not think or eat well. There were disputes at the Shore and some talked of another war, but it took no interest in the disputes. Most of all, it stopped eating 'lala fruits.

The ways of the Forest Creatures, the ways of the City, had completely freaked it out.

After almost two years, Pakssim finally came back to itself. There was another war, and more Shore Creatures died, and Pakssim was on the winning side again. But the happiness was not there. The glory seemed useless to it.

And so it made a choice. It would go to the Forest Creatures, and join the Nameless Ones, and live in the City, and learn the words, and learn to be a judge.

And it would bring the way of the Forest Creatures to the Shore Creatures.

Then there would be no more wars.

No one had told it that the words were lies.

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Jennifer Ariadne Park

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10.1 The Mountains

What I could not see from the pass was that the valleys between the mountain peaks made a nice little zigzag path practically across the whole mountain range. It was cold, and the icy snow was tough to walk on even with my aluminum spiky snow shoes, but for at least a month I hardly had to climb up or down to make it across. Perhaps I could have saved some distance if I had climbed over a hill or two, but I decided to make things easy for me by sticking with what seemed to be a naturally occurring mountain path.

Journey through ice... The fact that it was, relatively speaking, not a strenuous journey made it easier to enjoy the view for what it was. The ice in the mountains had a vague glow of purple, like the creatures and the soil, and didn't reflect the sun as blindingly as the snow in our world. It was all in all a pleasant passage. I had to keep my focus on my feet so I didn't slip or slide. I had to pay attention to the landscape to make sure I was staying on the easiest possible path. I had to keep careful track of my food supplies and make sure I was drinking, or eating, enough snow water. I needed to pitch my tent carefully so I stayed safe and warm. Nevertheless, it was an easy trip, so I could enjoy the mountains. They were not so breathtaking as the Himalayas or the Rockies, but there was a bit of charm in their repetitiousness, all the peaks having almost the same triangular shape, like children had drawn them, regularly spaced, almost the same height. They had a unique beauty all their own, much like everything else in this world.

It seemed that the passage started to slope downward more and more, so I began to think maybe the end of the journey was near. The temperature hadn't changed much, and the weather was generally good, with only an occasional drizzle-drizzle of snow, but I was afraid that it could turn on me at any moment. It could very well have been the warmest time of the year, and I feared to think what winter would bring.

Then the passage came to a sudden stop, at the lowest point of the passage. It lead into what appeared to be a vast frozen lake, surrounded by mountains. Perhaps this lake would thaw in the summer, and all the melting snow from the mountains would flow here. Or perhaps this was just an illusion, or an accident, or an imagination of a tired mind stunned by the sudden end of the easy part

of her journey. It seemed I'd been walking on a river leading to this lake.

At any rate, I looked around the "lake" to see which way out I could take. The way I had come was certainly the easiest way out. The lake being so low in the ground, the peaks around the lake, which probably were the same height as all the other peaks I had passed by, seemed even higher and more forbidding. I examined the gaps between the peaks ahead, and focused on two possible candidates. One was flanked by shorter peaks, but was a narrow gap, and the other was flanked by taller peaks and was a bit higher, but was a wide gap. I surveyed the lake again. I was sure it was in fact a frozen lake, and, if so, I was afraid it could crack and I would fall through. If I were to go around the lake, the narrow gap would be much closer. I chose the narrow gap.

At first it seemed I had chosen wrong. The valley leading up to the gap was hard to reach, and the valley itself was a hard climb. For the first time, I had to use my arms to climb up it at times; I regretted not having made snow shoes for my hands. I worried that I would use up the rest of my last month to reach the top of the gap, and I would have to turn back as soon as I got there.

There was nothing I could do to speed up the journey. Eating less to save the provision was out of the question, as exhausted as I was after every day's climbing. On the days I slept, it became really difficult to pitch the tent on the sloping ground. I regretted not having brought a shovel as I dug in the snow with the snowshoes to level things out.

Then it snowed... the same drizzle-drizzle of snow, for four or five days. The soft powder of the snow made the surface more slippery in places and more powdery-deep in others, and it seemed better to just wait it out.

When the snow stopped, the struggle continued, and the more I struggled the more I thought about how difficult it would be to go back down the slope. Perhaps I would have to fashion some skis or a sled or something, and skid down the whole way, which I was already in danger of doing at any moment at this point. Then, I had the easy but mostly uphill trek back to deal with. Sledding down the hill would cut a few days from the trip down hill, but the uphill trek might add more than a few days.

These kinds of thoughts proved quite distracting, as I lost much of the hope of making it to the other side of the mountains. I was disappointed to find the mountain pass to be not a peak but the edge of a plateau, and it took me several more days of walking, albeit easier, to get to its other edge. The moment I reached the other edge, it was getting much too dark, and I was quite tired, so I

just pitched the tent and went to sleep.

When I woke up, the sun had risen already. Usually, I slept a whole day through, the whole day being only about eight hours long in our time, and woke up a bit before the sun rose for the second time. Either I had slept in from fatigue, or the sun was rising earlier. As it turned out, I was right on the edge of the mountains. I didn't know this at the moment, of course. I was just annoyed at the sun shining through the tent walls, thinking that it had woken me up unnecessarily early.

I ate and packed up my tent as I had done every day of this journey, and it wasn't until it was the middle of the day that I could see what lay ahead. The view! Teal, teal, teal, as far as I could see. Valleys and patches of grasslands, what appeared to be grand rivers flowing. To my left, far, far away, I could see the greenery fading into gray, like there was a vast desert. It was possible that there was a desert to my right, but much farther away, as well. All visible from the mountain's edge.

At exactly half point in my planned journey, I had reached the other side, but with another good half a month to go before I could actually reach the greenery. I had to make a decision. I had originally planned to return home from this exact point, but what lay ahead was so clearly worth the bother. If I returned, I would be trekking right back along the snowy mountains again, and it was clear that I could not hope to ever reach the Outlay, unless I somehow grew strong enough to carry another month's worth of stuff. (Or, invent a better transporting method, which I later did.) That seemed unlikely. If I returned, I would never come back again. It was, besides, way too much work. I actually thought I would rather die in this place because I run out of food than go back through the snowy mountains again.

So the decision was made.

The trip down hill, as giddy as I was, was quite a bit more treacherous than I had thought. It wasn't just all downhill from the edge of the mountain pass. Or, more precisely, the only way to go straight downhill was to roll down the very steep and bare hillside for days and days. To avoid this, I had to make a more careful plan of going up and down littler hills and going around peaks and taking quite a detour. I had eaten through more than half of the rest of my food to reach the end of the snow line, and it took me another half a month to reach some serious trees and a decent sized stream.

The trees here were different. They were obviously the same family or order or whatever,

from the way the leaves grew in a cactus-like way, but the trees were much taller and wider, and the ground was littered with moist, old, composting leaves. They were deciduous, I later found out. There were hardly any bushes to be found, and a slow panic crept into my head as I reached the bottom of my supplies.

What was I going to eat?

There were no fruits anywhere. If this was in fact a temperate area, it might have been the wrong season. Too early or too late. Also, even if I found something, I would have absolutely no idea what was poisonous and what was not.

Then I found the fish. The legendary greasy fish. All the streams of this land were full of them, everywhere you go. I never had eaten fish back in the land of my creatures, for they were poisonous to the creatures and they had no way of catching them. The fish there were suspicious and shy, and generally rare and small.

The fish in this land traveled in gangs, confidently storming their territory in the streams, ponds, and lakes. You could wade right into them and they didn't budge. You could practically pick one up with bare hands, and they wouldn't even deign to notice, as if it was of no concern to them if one or two of them went missing.

Since I couldn't catch them with my bare hands, I fashioned a kind of a net with my snowshoes, and could easily catch them as I needed them. They were greasy all right, but not much more than the insects. They had smooth skin, like eels or something, and were largely shaped like the fish in our world, except they had a few more fins running down the side. That made sense, if the six-legged creatures evolved from these things. They tasted horrible raw or dried, unlike the insects which could be eaten raw or dried.

So, for the first time in this world, I started a fire for cooking, using some sticks of wood. Once cooked, however thoroughly, the fish tasted a bit like undercooked breakfast sausage patties, a bit grainy and very juicy, cooler to the touch than it really was. I loved it. Memories from childhood in my own world flooded back to me, eating sausage patties in the morning, the one decadent treat in which my mostly vegetarian parents indulged. The irresistible smell of burning pork fat.

I missed home.

Home, now even farther away than it had ever been.

Both my homes, now so far away.

The only problem with the fish was that I often got very farty from eating them, and at times had very stinky diarrhea. Too much fat, I thought, so I tried to find out how to cook the fat out, but it was all the same. In the end, I discovered that the best thing to do was to cook them fast to keep most of the fat in, dry them thoroughly, then cook them again on glowing embers for a long time. I still farted a lot, but then I got much less diarrhea, and I ended up with a light food that kept for a long time, was easy to travel with, and was a great preparation for winter.

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10.2 The Learning

Pakssim arrived at the City with tenthree other Shore Creatures who had similar thoughts. They were greeted by the Nameless Ones with the warmest welcome. They were invited to join their raising houses, and went to live in six houses, two each, and many of them laid Forest Creature children, and they all raised many children. Living the way of the City was very different from the way of the Shore, and living in raising houses was the best way to learn a different way of life.

Most Forest Creatures could learn to speak the words within a year or so, taking almost a lifetime to become a good word speaker. The City children were spoken to in words, and took them as long to learn the words as other Forest Creature children took to learn Forest Creature language. The Nameless Ones taught the Shore Creatures first how to screech, and speak the sounds of the words. This was easy, although painful. Then came the words, which were not hard to speak, but hard to learn, because Pakssim and the other Shore Creatures did not know Forest Creature language, and in fact many of the Nameless Ones did not know Forest Creature language. Trading signs did not have all meanings, and the Shore Creatures did not know all trading signs. In the end, their raising house livers taught them writing first, which was not how it was usually done. Shore Creatures were not as good with hands as Forest Creatures, but they became better at writing than the Forest Creatures, as their fingers and arms were long like the Great One's. Some of the houses made the Shore Creatures their word users because of this, and being the word users helped the Shore Creatures learn the words much, much faster than trying to speak them. As we word users know, words live with different rules of coming, and live their own speaking, and live better written than spoken. Pakssim did not have the most beautiful writing, but it could speak the words the best among the Shore Creatures who came.

The Great One was not in the City at the time Pakssim and the Shore Creatures arrived. She had gone to the Outlay to see if Forest Creatures could live there, too. As it was, the Forest Creatures, and all the Creatures who came to live with them, built many villages around all the rivers. Many Valley Creature villages became Forest Creature villages, which were built like the City, with

gardens of plants and ditches of water. There was talk of a village that was becoming very big, and soon it could be as big as the City. There were, in fact, many such villages, some as far as the place where Creatures had built houses over rivers like Field Creatures' houses, but which had been empty.

So it became hard for the Judges to make judgments on all things in everywhere of the Forest Creatures' lands. It took two months to get from the City to the farthest villages, maybe more to get to all Forest Creatures. If you counted the Valley Creatures who lived in their old ways with their many gods, many of whom asked for the Judges' judgments, it could take even more. By the time the judgments came back, it was often too old. As more and more Valley Creatures and Field Creatures came to live with the Forest Creatures, there were also very many judgments to be made, and the Judges did not have enough time for everything.

The Judges were told to make their own decisions while the Great One was in the Outlay, so they decided to make Judges in other villages when they became big, and could no longer be called a village. There were five such villages, and they were called Towns. There were twotenfour more villages where the Judges went to once a year to make less important judgments, and they were called Poles. Even the City had two sets of Judges, one just for the City, and one for all Forest Creatures. The Judges who were for all Forest Creatures were called Judges' Judges, and they only judged between Judges.

Many of these changes happened while Pakssim was in the City. Since the Shore Creatures were now Nameless Ones, they voted in the elections. They could have become Judges, too, but they needed to learn more of the Forest Creatures' ways and the City's ways and the words.

In the third year, when Pakssim and the Shore Creatures could speak and write words very well, it was very dry all year. The rivers started flowing less and less, and the ditches could not water like before. In the City and in many Towns and villages, gardens did not make the plants flower, and sun did not make the plants make fruits. The Forest Creatures always kept much fruit in their houses in the City and the Towns and villages, but many of the villages away from the City did not have enough fruits to live on. So many fruits were sent from the City houses to the village houses, and soon no one had enough fruits to live on.

Lucky For Me, the rains came back, and the fruits came back on the plants, and there were

more fruits to live on. The dry time made the Forest Creatures worry, still, and they thought they should keep more fruits in the City for another dry time. So they built places to keep the fruits in the City, and asked all Forest Creatures to bring more fruits to the City when they had many, so they may keep more for a dry time. Many villages did not have any to give away, for their gardens were new and did not have many plants, but they, too, had to give fruits to the City.

The Judges also asked the Valley Creatures to send fruits, but Valley Creatures did not have many fruits, for they did not live the way of the Forest Creatures. They caught and raised the insects, and dried their meat, and collected the poop, and traded the meat and the poop for the fruits. So they had to dry more meat and collect more poop and trade more meat and poop for more fruits so that they could send fruits to the city. For a while, this was good, since there were many insects coming every year, but they worked harder than before to send more fruits to the City. To help them, more Valley Creatures came back from the villages of the Forest Creatures, but then they also ate more, and they had learned to eat 'lala fruits and the many fruits of the Forest Creatures, so they also traded more with the Forest Creatures.

The Field Creatures, who were building their houses again, did not have any fruits to give, and did not have very many leathers to trade, and they ate more and more fish as the Forest Creatures could not trade them as many fruits for not eating the roots. The Forest Creatures did not ask them to give fruits to keep in the City, but told them to give leathers rather than trade them. This meant the Field Creatures had to eat more fish, but there were never enough fish in the rivers, and so times were difficult for the Field Creatures.

The Judges knew the Valley Creatures and the Field Creatures could not give many fruits to the City, so they asked for only what they could give, for they could give them many fruits when the rivers became small and many insects did not come. Still they needed more fruits to keep than the Forest Creatures were growing, so they decided to make more gardens, which meant more villages to be built, and more land to become Forests. More land, tho, meant more Forest Creatures, and more Forest Creatures to eat fruits, so more fruits did not always come to the City.

In the fourth year, five of the Shore Creatures returned to the Shore. Pakssim did not return with them. The Shore Creatures who returned tried to teach words to the Shore Creatures, but they did not want to learn. They did not know how judgments were made, so they could not make the

Shore Creatures stop their ways and decide disputes without wars. There was a very quick war that year, and the word users could not stop the war, and three of the word users died in the war. The two others returned to the City.

Meeting with the word users who returned to the City, Pakssim thought maybe the Shore Creatures could not be taught to use the words, and decide disputes with judgments. This was a problem. It wanted to stop the wars, but did not know how. Then, one of the returned said There is a great way to make the Shore Creatures stop their wars.

What is that, Pakssim asked.

We start a war. If we win, they must obey.

Pakssim thought about this for many days. It was wrong to start a war, and that's why it was learning the words and learning how judgments are made. Yet it was right to use words and use judgments, and so it was right to start a war to make the Shore Creatures use words and use judgments. Yet it was wrong to start a war.

Pakssim had been learning the ways of judgments by going to the Judges' Judges every time they were making a judgment. The way they spoke. The way they looked at written words. The way they chose together. The Judges' Judges were good teachers, and Pakssim knew them well.

So Pakssim decided to ask them the question of whether it was right to start a war to end a war.

The Judges' Judges agreed to decide, although Pakssim was not a Judge, because this was an important question for the Shore Creatures. They thought as if all the Shore Creatures had been one village, and as if Pakssim had been their Judge, and had come to ask the Judges' Judges. The problem was that for many times the months ran with the years, the Forest Creatures never had had a war. Their Blamas Clan was always ready for war, keeping the Metal stones and learning to throw them, but they never had a war, and they did not really know how to have a war. So the Judges asked Pakssim, who had been in many wars and had won many times, how wars are done. Pakssim told them the best it could, but this was hard, since Pakssim never spoke of war in words, only in Shore Creatures' language, and the words were missing many of the meanings for wars.

The Judges' Judges decided, and said, Since wars can not be described by words, it must be that wars can not be done by Judgment. If wars are started, wars are done, but Judgment cannot start a war. Perhaps the Great One, when she returns, can say more about how wars are done by

word users, since she is the one who taught us to make weapons, and there are many wars where Men and Women live. She must know about wars, but she hasn't told us or any of the word users about them. For now, however, word users do not start wars.

Pakssim returned later that year to the Shore. All the Shore Creatures returned, except one who had died in the City and one who had decided to go up the river, near the old houses like the Field, because many of the Forest Creatures who were raising its children were going there to start a new village. It wanted to learn how to start gardens, although Nameless Ones were not allowed to do the growing, so it could teach other Shore Creatures how to grow gardens.

Soon there was a war among the Shore Creatures, and Pakssim refused to pick a side. This war promised to be a big, long one, and it was hard to refuse the glory, but Pakssim and the other word users refused. The leaders came and talked to them, but they did not change their minds. So it was necessary that the leaders try to kill them, but Pakssim threw Metal stones that he brought back from the City, and both the leaders died. This had never happened before. The leftovers were always killed, and the leaders killed their own to pay for their death, and the wars went on. This confused the Shore Creatures a great deal. Normally, the wars ended when the leaders died; this was the rule forever so that wars do not go on forever. One of the leaders always died, and the wars always ended, and the other side won the dispute. Now both the leaders were dead even before the wars started.

Some Shore Creatures thought that this meant that they should pick new leaders, since the dispute was still not settled, and war must be started for the dispute to be settled. Of course, no one remembered what the dispute was, and no one cared about who won the dispute. They wanted a war.

Some others thought this was not the rules, and, of course, a new war was soon started.

Again, Pakssim and the word users refused to join. One of the leaders managed to kill a word user this time, but Pakssim and the other word users quickly killed the leader. The other leader tried to kill the remaining six, but it, too, was killed, as were great many others, and one more word user died.

Then Pakssim spoke to all the Shore Creatures. I have won the war. Two wars were started, and no side won, except me and my side. This is not by the rules of wars, but it is obvious that we

will always be leftovers, and we will always kill the leaders, and we will always win. For as long as we are word users, we will stop all wars before they start. Wars must stop starting.

To many Shore Creatures, this was good. It was not right, but it was good. Two wars failed to start. Pakssim had stopped the wars; whoever killed a leader stopped the war, and isn't the one who stopped the war the one who won the war?

Other Shore Creatures could not accept this, so they wanted a war to settle this. Pakssim told his side that they are to prepare for war, but not to kill unless they were about to be killed. Many of Pakssim's side died at first, but soon they fought back, and they won after a long, long war in which many more died. One more word user died.

At the crumbling, Pakssim gave all honor to all Creatures who died, and told the Creatures who had picked the wrong side that there will be no dishonor to them. Because the word users' side won, the word users now decided what was right. From now on, Shore Creatures would live by words and by judgments.

Since there were only four word users left by this time, they were the only ones who could be judges. Pakssim decided not to be a Judge, but a teacher, to teach words to as many Shore Creatures as it could find. The Judges decided that the Shore Creatures were not to live by all of the Forest Creatures' ways, since the life at the Shore was very different. There was no land to grow gardens, and no mud to build houses with bricks, and the Forest Creatures had no clans for fish catchers and makers of sand vattery. Since very few knew words, there was no need for Nameless Ones. All Shore Creatures were to be of all clans. All Shore Creatures who could were to learn the words.

The Forest Creatures had a Pole very close to the Shore, with many Nameless Ones living there, so Shore Creatures who wanted to learn the words went to live at this Pole. Others learned from Pakssim and the other word users.

Pakssim died the next year, and its body was crumbled by all word users. To honor its bringing the words and judgments to the Shore, the Judges decided to give it a name. So it came to be known as Pakssim, the first to do. It was honored as the first teacher, and all teachers who came after it were called a Ssim, the one to do.

Unlike the Forest Creatures, Shore Creatures kept teachers and Judges separate. Often the

Judges asked teachers questions, but always the teachers lived by the Judges' judgment. Unlike the Forest Creatures, Shore Creatures never made clans, and the teachers and the Judges were honored only as long as they were teachers and Judges.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

11.1 The Outlay

One thing that they never had in the creatures' land, and I should have thought that this was odd and thought of it sooner, was forest fires. Considering that everything dried up quickly upon death, to the point where you could crumble or shred everything to bits, and considering how easily and hotly the trees burned, one would think that there would be wild fires all the time. The creatures sure started a lot of fire for their kilns, so it was not like there was no source of a spark or something to start a forest fire. Yet, it never happened. I think it was because things didn't just lie around on the ground when they died. As soon as things dried, they crumbled to dust, and dissolved into the ground with the next rain. The only sources of oil and other longer-lasting stuff that could be flammable, such as the migratory insects and the fish, were in or near the water. Leather was not very flammable, and the desert animals, although they ate a lot of fish, had crumbly bodies just like the creatures.

And, in the Outlay, there were a lot of forest fires. There was a lot more debris on the ground, old leaves and branches and dead grasses and shrubs and what not, and periodically a fire would sweep through the forests or fields with great vigor and speed. Only, the fire didn't burn as hot and long as the fire in the creature's land, and I could wait them out in a river or a lake as it passed through or petered out.

There was a great fire almost every month the whole first year I was in the Outlay. As was my plan, especially now that I was well equipped with cooked fish, I could explore quite a bit of the land. The area where I landed was dominated by that one sweeping river. Closer to the river, the land was very flat and moist, covered with smaller, more grass-like plants. Away from the river and toward the mountains, there were more trees and shrubs. Away from the river and away from the mountains, there was the area I thought was a desert, but it was actually a different kind of grassland. There were no rivers overground, and so I could not go very far into this area. The climate was much drier, and the grasses had a golden glow rather than the usual teal-green tint. These grasses were definitely the same family as the usual grass, though, which meant probably that the teal-green color was not the color of whatever they've got for photosynthesis, or perhaps the

golden color was a miraculous mutation. I thought perhaps it was a dry season color or they were dormant plants, but these plants were apparently alive and growing, probably feeding on an underground source of water. Perhaps they didn't photosynthesize.

Unlike in the creatures' land, and unlike the Outlay fish, the insects were very difficult to find in the Outlay. For one, they did not live by the rivers or any bodies of water in the Outlay, and they certainly did not eat fish. As much as they loved the water and eat fish in the creatures' land, they preferred to skip around, grasshopper-like, in the drier areas of the grasslands, where the grasses sometimes grew taller than me. Once in a while I'd see one hopping over the grass, to be hidden again. Whenever I caught sight of them, they were eating grasses. They were grass-eaters through-and-through.

What was more surprising was that once in a while I'd stumble into a clearing in the grassland where certain low shrubs were planted. These shrubs, it turned out, were fruit trees, and they were being cultivated by the insects. I watched once as a large group of them chomped away a section of the grassland, dug and tilled the ground, and planted what were clearly seeds, carefully kept from the last growth cycle's harvest. They tended these plants all the time, weeding and cultivating and even fertilizing with poop. They had hands on their front legs that were almost as dexterous as the creatures, although they always walked on all six legs, and could not sit up or stand up on account of their extra-long and powerful hind legs. They also clearly cooperated with each other, and somehow communicated with each other, although not through anything like speech.

I say growth cycle, and not year, because, it turned out, the seasons ran by what the creatures reckoned to be a year. That is, one season, one year; the year I arrived at the Outlay was the summer. When the next year came, it was fall. The next year was winter, and then spring after that. (Yes, I ended up staying there for a little over three years.) This was quite strange, as in the creatures' land the temperatures did go up and down with the year, and every year was about the same. The sun's movement and the adjusting of sundials coincided with the year, although the angle of the sun was not very dramatic. So there must have been something other than the planet's orbit around the sun that changed the seasons; perhaps the sun itself changed, or some geothermal source. I never did find out.

Anyway, the life cycle of the Outlay plants went according to this four-year cycle of seasons. Not much happened in the summer; it was the growing season. At the beginning of the fall, the weather was wetter, and grasses and the trees bloomed in large numbers, sometimes a great plume of pollen drifting across the land. All the Outlay plants bore seeds, and the fruits and seeds ripened quickly, falling to the moist ground toward the end of fall. The winter was cold and snowy, just like in our world. In the spring, it was the fruity shrubs' turn to bear fruit, along with some of the grasses. These plants were not as prolific with pollen. Plants often sprouted through the snow in the winter; the sun was just as bright even in the cold, snowy year, and kept these plants growing.

The animals, however, lived by the solar cycle. Regardless of the season, they seemed to find plenty of plant material to eat, so it was unnecessary for them to reproduce according to the season. In the summer, they ate grass. In the spring and the fall, they ate flowers and fruits, and collected seeds for planting in the dry days of summer. I'm not sure what the insects ate in the winter, but interestingly this was the season when the many-legged worms were the most active, swimming through the snow in search of plant debris and winter sprouts to feed on. Perhaps the insects ate these. The insects obviously were not as intelligent as my creatures, although they had figured out how to plant seeds and such. I thought of them as perhaps equivalent of monkeys in our world, if my creatures could be the equivalent of human beings.

The most amazing sight in the Outlay, of course, was the migration of the insects. Most of the time they lived in random-sized groups, the largest groups of a dozen or so coming together only to plant their farms, and often wandering around alone. Once every solar year, a great herd of them would collect by the rivers, thousands and thousands of them. There they mated in a chaotic orgy, so messy that I never could observe closely and figure out the anatomical stuff. Then they would eat everything in sight: plant, animal, or mineral. If they could've gotten to me, I have no doubt they would have eaten me, too. Then, after a month or so of merciless eating, they would climb up the mountains along one of the rivers. Not all of the ones in the feeding frenzy did this, however; I'd say only about a half or a two-third. Now, this river was quite a bit downstream of where I came over the mountains, over a month-and-a-half walk's worth, and turned out to be a far easier climb. Whether it was the summer year or the winter year, the insects hopped up the mountain with the same ease, although their number was noticeably smaller in winter. (So this explained why the number of insects coming over the mountains varied from year to year... this

would prove useful once I returned, as was this handy mountain route.) Their skin was still tough and firm when they began their mountain journey, so I assumed that their skin softened either during the journey or when they arrived at the other side, perhaps as pregnancy progressed. I could not imagine that they were hopping up the mountains with fully grown babies in their tummies.

Then, every year, a great number of insects, offsprings of the insects who had left, would return over the mountains. In the creatures' land, the insects mostly ate fish, and grew very fast. The ones coming back over the mountains were not as large as those of reproducing age, but they were quite grown, like adolescents. It appeared to me that fewer insects were returning than departed, but this might have been because the ones coming back were smaller.

There were a few cats in the Outlay. They were much smaller, and they migrated with the snow line as the seasons changed. They reproduced all year round and in all seasons, however, and always traveled in packs with babies of all sizes. There were at least three different types of cats, differing mostly in size and tolerance for weather. The taller ones were more gazelle-like, but quite lethargic, and were the last to migrate. They reminded me of the leather-producing desert creatures. The medium-sized ones were more active and very competitive with one another. They were always the first to appear and disappear with the seasons and for the smallest changes in weather. The smaller ones, almost the size of housecats, acted like our mice do, scurrying around in a great big herd, eating everything in their path. They always left a trail of poop behind them, which probably helped the plants regrow. I think they also ate the many-legged animals, but I couldn't be sure.

When the spring year returned, I could finally contemplate returning to the creatures. The mountain passes, despite how easily the insects navigated them, were not so accessible in the fall or the winter, and it was dubious in the spring. The problem was not just the snowy ice and the danger it posed. The real difficulty was in finding enough fish to carry me over the hill. Although the mountain stream went up quite high, there weren't enough fish higher up, and no matter how stocked up and resourceful I was, I could not start the trip back with enough food already packed. The snowy trek would have taken too long. I had to wait until the snow receded, so I could cross the snowy bit as quickly as possible. Spring also brought more fruits, and some of the trees even bore what turned out to be quite delicious fruits that I could eat—I watched the insects to see what they ate—with just a little risk of diarrhea. This helped me approach the snow line with very little of my

fish used up.

The mountain crossing back was quite unremarkable. Not totally easy, but a simple up-and-down climb with just one little part near the peak where the climbing got seriously difficult. There was even a little canyon that lead me back out to the foothills very close to where I had started my mountain climb. So, if I had followed a different branch of the streams, or if I had just looked a couple of peaks over to the right, my trip to the Outlay would have been far easier.

With extra fish to spare, I explored a little more of the area on my way back down. Up one of the river branches, I came across a vast desert area, like the one that used to surround our forest, complete with cliffy edges with rivers flowing out from the ground. It was also populated, rather sparsely, with those leathery, lanky creatures that used to live in great numbers by the forest. These were quite shy, and I could not get close enough to any one of them for a good look. I traveled up the edge of the desert for a few days, and left it at that. Perhaps my creatures could come here to harvest some leather some day, I thought.

And this was not that crazy a thought. In the three years or so I had been away, the creatures had migrated up the river with impressive energy. There were even great, big towns up the river not unlike our city, complete with irrigation ditches and vast areas of garden. Some of them even elected their own judges. Many of the villages had figured out how to keep the insects alive and raise the baby insects to eat. They didn't reproduce, of course, without going through the migration cycle, but this meant there was more meat to go around for everyone.

I kept forgetting that time went much faster for these creatures, and that just the few years I had been gone would have felt like a decade to them, a whole new generation coming of age since I had left. By the time I returned to the city, it was truly a national capital, and they seemed to have started quite a system of government. I was further resolved, therefore, to let them run their own business, leading my own little life with my closest friends in my little village.

So, after another twelve years of being back, during which nothing remarkable happened, I went on a trip to the Outlay again, this time better prepared and with a much easier time of getting across the mountains. I had more leather with me, too.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

11.2 The Patch

Soon the Great One returned from the Outlay to the Forest Creatures, and she was pleased with what the Judges had done. She gave more of the decisions for the Judges to make, and the Judges became more powerful, and the Forest Creatures became more powerful. Soon there was not a single Valley Creature or a Field Creature whose life was not done as the Nameless Ones told. The Forest Creatures even demanded that insect meats be kept in stores, even the insect children meats, as the Great One had told them how to know when there would be more or less insects coming, and so it was now necessary to prepare for the years when not many insects came.

The Great One was more and more a teacher rather than a Judge, and it was said she was the best teacher of words, although she spoke very little of the Forest Creature's language. She only taught to Forest Creatures, however, and loved to teach the art of Creation, which other Creatures, especially the Shore Creatures, did not want to learn, even though they were quite good at it when they tried it.

In the land that the Nameless Ones now ruled, there were two rivers, the Left and the Right. The river Left flowed through the Forest and the Field. Some of its water came from the Mountains that pointed to the Outlay, but most of it came from the many hills that made the Forest Creatures' new land. On these hills, no Creatures had ever lived before, except for a little land in the hills where some Creatures had built houses like the Field.

The river Right flowed through the Valley, and the river Left and the river Right met in the middle of the Valley, and flowed out to the Shore. Up the river Right, there was another land of houses built like the Field, where no one lived, and beyond the Field lived more Valley Creatures. Most of the water for the river Right came from the other hills, where many Valley Creatures lived. Some of the water of the river Right came from another set of hills that stood between the two rivers, where no Creature had lived before. Many Forest Creatures now lived there, but there were many parts of the hills where there were no rivers flowing, and so no plants could grow.

The Great One had told the Nameless Ones that in the beginnings of the river Left, there is a

small river that did not flow from the Mountains. On this river, there were more houses built on rivers like the Field, which no Creature had known of, and in this land, called the Patch, lived something like the Field Creatures. The Great One commanded the Nameless Ones to trade with these Patch Creatures for leather.

The Nameless Ones had never heard of the Patch Creatures, and no other Creatures had heard of the Patch Creatures. It was nearly three months away from the City, and at least a month away from the far away villages up the river where the gardens were new and the Creatures were tired. No one had seen the Patch, and no one had traded with the Patch Creatures, and no one knew if they knew the trading signs. Onehundred Nameless Ones were gathered at a village, and they marched to the Patch with a good store of fruits and insect meats. Most of the Field Creatures had died during the Pouring and afterward. Only a few hungry ones were living their way in the part of the Field that did not fall in the Pouring and was not covered in mud. If the Patch Creatures would trade for leather, there would again be enough leather for all Creatures, since only the Great One used many leathers, and most preferred to make and use Blamas leather, which was not as useless as it once was.

When the Nameless Ones arrived at the Patch, they could not speak or use trading signs with the Patch Creatures. The Patch Creatures did not understand anything the Nameless Ones said. When a Nameless Ones tried speaking the words with them, they ran away in pain. So the Nameless Ones waited for their long sleep, and when the long sleep came as it did every month, they went into the houses of the Patch Creatures, and took their leather, from dead and alive Patch Creatures, and left a fair trade of fruits and insect meats, and some of their best vattery.

Only, unlike the Field Creatures, the Patch Creatures did not sleep long for their long sleep, and before the Nameless Ones could leave the Patch, the Patch Creatures had come upon them and killed as many Nameless Ones as they could. The Nameless Ones fought back with Metal sticks and stones, but they did not bring many of those, as this was a trade, and they had to run away. The Patch Creatures did not chase them past the Patch for long.

When the Nameless Ones arrived at their village, they gathered more sticks and stones, and, with warriors from the Blamas Clan, returned to the Patch. They waited another month for the long sleep, and quietly took leathers from as many Patch Creatures as they could find, and ran away again. This time, the Patch Creatures followed them to the village, but they were chased back.

Many Nameless Ones, Blamas Clan warriors, and Patch Creatures died in these battles. The leathers of the dead Patch Creatures were useless; they crumbled with the dead body like any Creatures' fur. Only the leathers of Patch Creatures in long sleep could be used, for only then their body came off the leather and let the leather dry to softness. So the Nameless Ones had only just the leathers they had carried out when they ran away both times, which were not many, so to the Nameless Ones this did not seem a fair trade, for they had left fruits and vattery that ought to have been fair. To refuse to trade was grounds for war, and the Patch Creatures had started wars because they did not want to trade. This angered the Nameless Ones.

In a nearby Town, at the top of the river Right, where many Valley Creatures lived, lived the children of the Shore Creature who had come to the City to learn the words with Pakssim. This Shore Creature had died, but the children were taught how to war. These children came to help the Nameless Ones try yet another trade with the Patch Creatures. They gathered many, many more sticks and stones to throw, and taught the Blamas Clan warriors how to throw them the way Shore Creatures threw them.

At the next long sleep, the Nameless Ones went to trade again. Again the Patch Creatures chased them in anger, but this time the Blamas warriors were there to fight back. Very soon, all the Patch Creatures were running away, and the Nameless Ones were happy, but they still did not have much useful leather.

Around this time, a Judges' Judge arrived from the City to help the Judges of the Town decide. They asked, To start wars is wrong. Is it fair to start trades, when the trades are starting wars?

The Judges' Judge declared that this was different because the Great One had herself started this trade. If the Patch Creatures would not trade their leather, they are not just refusing the trade. They are refusing the Great One and the One God.

So the Nameless Ones and the Blamas Clan warriors went back to the Patch, and killed as many of the Patch Creatures as they could find, sleeping or not, dead or alive, leather or no leather.

This was the first time the Nameless Ones had started a war, and it frightened the Valley Creatures a lot. The Valley Creatures believed in the many gods, not in the One God, and they did not believe in the Great One's divinity. Still, they thought the Forest Creatures were fair, and they

traded well, and their Judgments were useful, and the words were useful. So they lived by the Forest Creatures' rules. However, they were tired of gathering insect meats and poops for the Forest Creatures, and they were tired of worms that drank their blood, and they were tired of being told how to do.

Even the Forest Creatures who had come to take the Valley Creatures' lands had been living more like the Valley Creatures, gathering insect meats and poops as well as growing the gardens. They were even more tired, and often hungry, for they could never produce enough fruits to be stored at the City.

So year after year the Nameless Ones went up the river Left to war with the Patch Creatures, and every year the Valley Creatures and Forest Creatures from the river Right had to join them in the war. They returned with little leathers, but the wars were great because it was right to the Nameless Ones, but not to those who lived on the river Right. They were tired and hungry, and now afraid. The Valley Creatures were especially afraid that they, too, would be punished for refusing to worship the One God, or at least for not sending enough insect meats without trade to the City.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

12.1 The West

From what I understood, by this time my creatures lived all along the river which flowed by my village and the city and which went all the way up to my mountain passes and that odd little desert patch. This river had another main branch, to what would be the East if the mountains were to be the North—the creatures thought of the mountains as "above" them—although then the sun rose from the West, but whatever. On this branch lived a separate tribe of creatures with whom my tribe traded many things. These creatures, who originally just lived down stream from us past the desert, had moved there after the "pouring," and they still supplied us with poop and insect meats. Apparently, the insects veered East after crossing the mountain, followed a string of hills down to the sources of the Eastern river, laid their young, and died. Then, the young insects that we didn't catch ate their way up the string of hills and went back over the mountains to the Outlay. Since we lived on a peninsula, I suppose there was a coastal route to the Outlay, but my creatures told me that the Eastern coast of the peninsula was riddled with monstrous creatures, who looked like the leathery desert creatures, but were much bigger, stronger, and shinier, and could kill and eat any one of us with a swat. So the East Coast and the Southeast, where the river met the ocean and where the glass-throwing creatures lived, were generally off limits to me. I guess I decided that the Eastern half of the peninsula just didn't belong to my tribe, and I should not bother with it. Lucky for me, there was plenty to explore in the West.

After my first trip to the Outlay, I took a year-long tour around the Western half of our peninsula. I began by cutting across the rolling hills to the West of the City. There was another string of hills there, too. These were not small hills. Some of them were often covered with snow, though just for brief periods at a time, and it was often unbearably cold even with my leather clothes and tent. Most of the animals on the Western hills were small, more rabbit- and mouse-sized, but there was an even greater variety of them than I had seen anywhere in this world. The trees, shrubs, and grasses also showed a great deal of variation. There were many branches of rivers, and many smaller, separate rivers, that flowed from the hills, and each stream of water had a distinct collection of animals and plants around it. They were of course of the same basic six-limbed, four-legged

design, most with useable front legs and dexterous hands. They were almost all the same purplish gray color, some with teal spots, many with black spots. The coloring varied a lot from river area to river area, but what varied the most was the facial features, such as the placement of eyes vs. the mouth, the location and size of ears, things like that. Whenever I became tempted to think of them as all the same species with just different face types, like human races, I would discover that they in fact moved and acted very differently. The large-eared types tended to be calm and observant. Small-eared or small-eyed types tended to be skittish. But, all in all, different animals in the same river area tended to behave more like each other than like other creatures of similar appearance elsewhere.

I've read up on animal taxonomy a bit since I've come back, and I now know that behavior and appearance are probably the least useful way of grouping animals. But, I didn't know this while I was there, and that was the best I could do.

On the other side of the hills, toward the sea, the landscape felt very different to me, although the plants and the animals were not that different, and the climate was a bit warmer and windier but not that much. It was more the energy of the land or something... perhaps more magical or peaceful or such. It could have been the age I was. I was in my early 30s I suppose, and I was a full grown-up. It didn't feel that way, since I didn't have a proper adolescence or early adulthood, but it may have been that something biological kicked in. I spent more time just sitting on a rock and enjoying the view, or trying to experiment with different ways of cooking things—I cooked a lot more since I came back from the Outlay, and discovered that many things tasted far better when cooked, especially in combination, and especially small animals; I never tried eating worms—or just pitching my tent somewhere and hanging out for days and days.

When I arrived at the sea shore, this feeling reached kind of a new, higher plateau. It didn't hurt that the Western coast was populated by huge, dinosaur-sized aquatic animals. They had that whale-like beauty about them as they frolicked in the water far away from the shore. There were also animals that would be equivalent to seals and sea lions, although they looked more like giant, hairless beavers, who liked to swim in the water and frolic on the beach. They mostly ignored me, and, rightly so, since I wouldn't have hurt them and couldn't have hurt them if I tried, considering how large and strong and fast they were. So I just wandered up the coast, eating fish and seaweed

and coastal fruits, weaving in and out of sea lion colonies, exploring up and down the rivers, all the while taking in the scene as it was rather than exploring it the way I had in the Outlay. I promised myself that I would do the same when I returned to the Outlay the next time.

Eventually the sea coast came closer and closer to the mountains, and the weather got colder and wetter. I chose a river that went up to the mountain, and walked along the foothills across many river valleys, noting the same kind of animal variation I had noticed before, but mostly just taking things in.

When I came back to my mountain passes, I followed the usual river back down. As I traveled down the river, my old sense of being returned, and that serene energy of the West dissipated. By the time I returned to my home, it was back to the hustle and bustle of the creatures' world, and it didn't feel uncomfortable or unfamiliar at all, as, after all, this was my home.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

12.2 The March

Now, the Shore Creatures lived over a very long part of the Shore, which took months to travel from one end to the other. They did not live beyond one end where the water was too hot for the good fish, and they did not live beyond the other end where the water was too cold for good trees. Most of the Shore Creatures lived at the end of the river, where there were the most fish from the river and from the sea, and this was where most of the word users and the teachers and the Judges lived. Even though the Shore Creatures were angry very fast, they also loved honor and glory and war, and so when they had wars they always waited to make sure all Shore Creatures could join the war. Even though the Shore Creatures were fast and could reach the far away Shore Creatures with news of war within a month, often the wars did not end in the far away villages for months after the wars ended by the river, if only because they loved war so much.

Now that all disputes were settled by Judgments, things changed. Now patience was used to wait for Judgments rather than for the warriors to get ready. This was good, for the Shore Creatures came to love the Judgments, and tried to learn the words. Village after village decided to have Judges of their own, and soon there were Judges everywhere, although the Shore Creatures never came to have the Judges' Judges the way the Forest Creatures did. When a dispute came between villages, as it often did, the Judges of the villages decided together. If they still could not decide, they would ask teachers who lived at the end of the river. If the teachers could not decide, they could then ask the Judges' Judges of the Forest Creatures, for they were closest to the Great One and could ask her to decide if they could not decide, but this never happened, as the Teachers always could decide.

In one of the farthest villages of the Shore Creatures lived a teacher of words, who did not have a name or whose name is not known any more. This teacher had learned the art of Creation at a Forest Creature Town, and started to teach it to its word users. Now, the Shore Creatures did not like the art of Creation, because they wanted to pursue words for right and truth and Judgment, not for lies. They wanted to keep their memories sorted out and disputes settled without war. Even though the Great One used Creation, they believed that this needed to be done only by those close

to the Great One, not by all word users, and certainly not by Judges.

The Creators, as those who used Creation called themselves, disagreed. They thought that Creation was a pretty thing, and that it should be what good life was about. The Shore Creatures never needed more to eat, for the fishes were plentiful and the water warm, so long as their village was not too far away from the water. They made pretty vattery because they were pretty, even though very few Creatures wanted them now. They tended the 'lala trees because they were pretty, even though they hardly ate the 'lala fruits and did not trade them any more. Surely, the words are the same. We have nothing to do but to eat and make pretty things. Why not pretty words?

When teachers began arguing with teachers about this, soon the Judges were asked to decide, and there were disputes all along the far shores where the water is cooler and the 'lala trees smaller and the fish is greasier in the river. Judges tried to decide, and many did decide, but then Judges began arguing with Judges all along the far shores. Soon the Judges came to the teachers at the end of the river, and the teachers tried to decide, and many did decide, but then the teachers at the end of the river began arguing with teachers and Judges and the teachers from far away places.

Now the Shore Creatures were out of habit for settling disputes with wars, so they did not just start preparing for a war. The teachers sent many of the Judges to the City, in a great march of threehundred Judges, seeking to ask the Judges' Judges, maybe the Great One herself.

Now, for many years, many Forest Creatures had welcomed the Shore Creatures who came to the City and the Towns to learn the words. Shore Creatures traveled always through Towns and villages, and the trading roads that connected them, and the Forest Creatures gave them food and let them sleep in their houses. They could not always speak to each other, for not all Forest Creatures used words, and most Shore Creatures who traveled to the Forest Creatures did not use words, and they did not know the Forest Creatures' language, except for trading signs, which many knew but not all. Still, the Forest Creatures let the Shore Creatures come into their houses, and join them as raisers, and eat their fruits.

However, the Forest Creatures, and the Valley Creatures who lived among them, had never seen threehundred Shore Creature Judges march on the trading roads. The Nameless Ones were naked, but the Shore Creature Judges wore the signs of the old war leaders, with strings of stones made from sand vattery, hats made of vattery, and their hammers of decision which were made of

vattery. Some even wore Blamas ropes that were given to them by their teachers—some were Hlata Blamas—and some wore coats of Blamas leather and Field Creature leather over their shiny skin.

To the Forest Creatures and the Valley Creatures, this looked like a war.

In the first village that came by the marching threehundred Judges, the Creatures simply ran away. Since no one offered food or kindness, the Shore Creature Judges chose houses to sleep in and to eat in. Because they were so large and so many, they almost ate up the stores in the small village.

The same thing happened in the next village, which was a bit bigger, but they too ran out of food when the marching Judges made it through.

And so on.

By the time the Judges reached the nearest Town, the Forest Creatures were ready to fight. Now, there was a wise Nameless One who lived in this Town who had taught many Shore Creatures, and it thought perhaps there was a mistake, and there cannot be a war any more, since the Shore Creatures no longer did war but made judgments. It managed to tell the Judges of the Town to wait to start a war, although they were brave and the Blamas Clan warriors were ready, and many of them had learned how to do war from fighting the Patch Creatures.

The Nameless One went out to meet the threehundred Shore Creature Judges, and asked them in words, Why are you here and why did you take the food.

The Shore Creatures replied in words, We are going to the City to ask the Judges' Judges a very important question about Creation, for the Judges can not decide and the teachers can not decide.

What is this question, then, maybe I can answer it, said the Nameless One.

No, said one of the Judges, an impatient one, we need to ask the Judges' Judges, for we, too, are Judges.

I am not a Judge, said the Nameless One, but a teacher, but I know the words and I know the ways of the Great One, I can at least answer your question.

No, said the Judge, the impatient one, we have many teachers who know words and know the ways of the Great One who had learned from the teachers of the City, and they gave us many answers. If you give us an answer, it will be just another answer from just another teacher.

This made the Nameless One a bit angry, for it thought it knew more about the One God

and the ways of the Great One than any of the Shore Creatures, for the Shore Creatures were new to the ways of the Great One and did not believe in the One God. Nonsense, it said, I am super, for I am closer to the Great One.

Now, the Shore Creatures had no meaning that meant super. It had a meaning that meant the winner of a war, and the word super was thought to mean winning or ought to be winning. So the Shore Creature, the impatient one, calmly said, you cannot be super unless you won the war.

The Blamas Clan warriors who had come with the Nameless One did not speak the words, for only Nameless Ones among Forest Creatures were taught the words, so they did not understand this talk.

When the Shore Creature spoke to the Nameless One, however, the Nameless One became very angry, and repeated the word, war, war, asking over and over if that's what the Shore Creatures wanted, and then said the meaning for war in Forest Creature language.

The Blamas Clan warriors heard the meaning for war, and thought this was what the Shore Creatures had come for after all, and raised their arms to ready their sticks and stones. One of their leaders signaled to return to the Town for more weapons, perhaps the stones and sticks on carts that could kill many Creatures in one ride.

Noticing this, the Nameless One yelled out, No, no, no, no war, in Forest Creature language, but to the Shore Creatures this sounded like a call to arms, and a great war would have surely started, but one of the Shore Creatures knew many meanings of the Forest Creature language and stopped the other Shore Creatures.

A war did not start.

Although a war did not start, it was thought by the Shore Creatures that the Forest Creatures would not allow a march of threehundred Shore Creature Judges through their villages and Towns, although they were all word users, and knew the ways of the Great One, and came for Judgment and not war. So they returned to the Shore.

They decided for themselves after many days of discussion. They decided that Creation was beautiful, but it was also dangerous. The Great One would want them to be careful when it was used. So long as a Creature was a Judge, it could not do Creation. Memory keepers and those who wanted to become a memory keeper could not do Creation. Teachers could do Creation, but could

only do it with one another, and could only teach it to Creatures who wanted to become a teacher and did not want to become a memory keeper. To Bad For Me, these rules became so complicated, that many who knew Creation became judges and memory keepers, and those who did not learn it from teachers also did Creation, and even the Shore Creatures' memories became lies by the words. They did do a good job, still, keeping the Judgments free of Creation, and only memories of Judgments were used for Judgments, so it was not so bad.

The Judges chose the best of the memory keepers, and told them to decide which memories were best to keep in words. Only the memories that were kept as the memory keepers decided, then, became the word memories. All others were just plain words, beautiful or ugly, but not always true. These memory keepers chose the words that must come before all true memories, so anyone who read the words would know that they are true.

For many Shore Creatures, tho', when the threehundred Judges could not go to the City to meet the Judges' Judges or the Great One and ask to decide the dispute, it reminded them of many old memories of anger at the Forest Creatures. For as long as the months ran with the years, the Shore Creatures were angry at the Forest Creatures and the Great One for changing the trades and stopping the trades. For many years since Pakssim, the Shore Creatures had come to see the Forest Creatures as teachers of the words, and of the ways of the Great One, that brought them judgments and stopped their wars.

Now, it seemed, the Forest Creatures were the Nation of war, and Shore Creatures lived more by the way. When the stories about the wars with the Patch Creatures came, the Shore Creatures believed more that they were closer to the Great One, even their decision that Creation should be taught very carefully.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

13.1 The War

There was a lot of talk among my creatures about what I could only describe as an impending invasion. Although the creatures insisted that they had never had wars before, it was also clear that they had soldiers who regularly trained in military drills. Although these soldiers could not be really told apart from the others, since they didn't have uniforms or bases or marches through the city on Memorial Day or anything, you could tell which ones were trained in how to throw aluminum spear points by the way they carried themselves. They tended to walk or stand on their hind feet more, since they were trained to stand up high to be able to throw far and accurately. They also could be seen carting around stockpiles of spear points around the city and the villages. If I had known more about how military trainings were done in our world, I would have taught them about it, like marching in formation and such, but I didn't know very much, and I thought marches were just for show, so I didn't bother. They knew what they were doing.

In their religious myths, on the other hand, they talked about a lot of wars and battles. Most of these concerned an ancient hero, like a Hercules, who vanquished a lot of the creature's enemies, who were mostly monstrous mythical creatures. Their monstrousness was marked by how many limbs they had; the more legs they had, the more evil they were. The Hercules-hero, who was never named but just referred by a word that meant "it" or, rather, "It," had four limbs, like humans, and stood very, very tall, even taller than me. It was told that It had moved mountains and built entire forests to defend the creatures, and always completely exterminated the enemies. Details about how these battles were conducted were never really there. Most of the stories center on physical descriptions of the enemies, the evilness of their behavior, etc., and then the hero comes in and zaps them away. Then some kind of decree usually followed as a conclusion to the story. These were not quite morals of the stories, as in "those demons were bad because they did such and such so you should not do that." The way they told it, the hero just used each victory as an occasion to lay down another rule of conduct. Most of these rule-verses were quite confusing, with lots of words which the creatures did not use in every-day life any more, some even with rarely used vowels and consonants, and neither they nor I could translate them into a form I could understand. Yes, all the

stories were told in poetry, as with all of their memory records. Curiously, they never wrote these down in English; I think translating them would have been too much work, and a lot of the story, especially the morals, would be lost in the process. (Like I mentioned, if I had known their language better, I would have helped them come up with an alphabet of their own, but I never came around to doing this.)

So the rumors about a possible war with a neighboring tribe made us anxious and excited us. War would be something scary and dangerous, but also something new and different and yet familiar. The rumor had started when I first came back from the Outlay, but was not taken seriously by the time I was touring the West. A couple of years later, however, there were more reports of trade convoys being turned back, and large numbers of the other tribes besieging smaller villages, and other things that suggested that something was about to happen. Apparently, refusing to let trade convoys in was the customary prelude to the declaration of war among other tribes.

The production of the aluminum spear points stepped up, and I was asked to help them with designing more powerful weapons. Even before my trip to the Outlay, I had designed a cart with rotating spears that could be driven through the enemy and do some damage. The creatures started making more of these, although it had never really been tested in battle. I showed them how a sling shot could be made, but without rubber or wood that bent like a spring, they could not make a really decent one. They did create hand-held flinging sticks with a lever that released many spear points at once at a great speed. They experimented with different shapes, and started using something that looked like a sheriff's star, with rounded, bulgy points that made them safer to throw but more dangerous at the receiving end. (I don't know how they knew this, since they obviously didn't throw these at each other, and mostly tested them on loosely-hung leather. Oddly enough, the rounded, bulgy points did work better on leather)

Fortunately, I missed the war entirely. For a while, things were tense in the city, but soon it turned out that the disruptions in trades were just disruptions in trades. Once we got used to interacting less and less with the other tribes through trading—although life in the city centered on trading and the number of people living in the city and other larger villages began to visibly shrink—things settled down to a new level of routine. Fewer creatures were practicing throwing spear points, and fewer weapons were getting made. Although the creatures made an important

discovery at this time, of using woven strings of insect intestines as we use rubber, it came at a time when the need for rubber was no longer so urgent. Less trade meant no need for long-distance carts. No war meant no need for slings.

So after ten years—or ten-two years in their math—had passed since my return from the Outlay, I got the yearning to go to the Outlay again. And it seemed it was perfectly safe for me to go; there was no serious threat of a war breaking out, and the creatures were well-prepared to defend themselves if it did. I needed to wait two more years for the summer year again, so I had plenty of time to prepare this time, and I knew exactly how to prepare. The rubber-covered wheels came in handy during the first part of the long trip, to the foothills of the mountains, as we could gather and carry a great deal more supply. We used four-wheeler carts from village to village, then one-wheeler wheelbarrows on rougher roads. The rubber also made very comfortable straps for my leather backpack. I also made a wheelbarrow that could be converted into a sled for going on snow. The wheels, sled legs, and spare rubber tires added considerably to the weight, but I could carry a lot more than I could just in a leather backpack. I also had some special tools made for catching and preparing the fish for drying.

And off I went, over the mountains again. Nothing special happened on this trip. The only difference was my frame of mind, like during my trip to the West. I brought back some seeds of trees with flexible wood that I thought might be handy for weapons and such, but they didn't grow well in our climate.

So, the war. I wasn't there, and coherent news-reporting was not in the creatures' habit, so I had to piece together what happened while I was gone for four years. Apparently, the first time I was gone, there was a drought. The creatures managed to pull through the drought with spare food that they had kept in storage out of habit. Still, it came close to being a serious famine, and many of the smaller villages had to be helped out by the creatures in the city. So, after the drought, they created a plan to store as much of their food as they could—the fruits kept almost indefinitely, with some minor deterioration of flavor, if kept whole and dry, in tightly sealed vats so they didn't dry out completely and turn to dust, or get wet and melt away—in storage houses around the city. For some reason, they didn't think to do this in all the villages. Also, only the creatures in my tribe did this, and the creatures in the Eastern fork of the river, for instance, didn't have any food stored at all.

My creatures also didn't think to start a reservoir—which didn't occur to me either, so it's partly my fault for having all these irrigation ditches dug without thinking we'd need a reservoir to keep the ditches flowing in dry times. The thing is, there never had been dry years like this, or so they told me. Interestingly, it did rain on and off during the “dry year,” and by all accounts it seemed it did not rain any less often or any less at a time, but I couldn't tell you what happened because I was not there.

So my tribe, on the Western fork of the river, was fine during the second drought, and the rubber wheels came in handy for transporting the stored food to the more remote villages. The Eastern fork tribe, however, was having a hard time. So my tribe offered to help, but thought it would be easier if the Easterners just moved to our cities and villages, since the roads were not as well maintained along the Eastern fork.

Then, apparently, something involving ancient trading contracts was brought up. The way I understood it, in order for some or most of the Eastern folks to come live with the Western folks, the Eastern folks who remained had to be compensated somehow, as if they sold the folks who were moving as slaves, although it had nothing to do with slavery, so I didn't quite understand this. It was more like one thing lead to another, and before you knew it there were armed skirmishes all along the border between the tribes, and soon there was a great war all over the Eastern fork of the river. The Eastern tribe, being short of food and weaponry, appealed for help to the Southern tribe, the glass-throwers. At first, they didn't want to intervene, but again one thing lead to another and they were marching up the river.

Creatures of my tribe fled to the larger villages, and watched helplessly as their villages were pillaged by the Southern folks. They were safe in these towns, however, as they were defended by our best soldiers and our best weapons. Within a year, my tribe had managed to gather their resources and make a plan for attacking back, and so they did. By the time the rains returned, my tribe had taken back all of the land, and with the great number of creatures in the other tribes killed in the war, it became clear that the other tribes would not dare attack us again for a long, long time.

It was sad to return to the creatures after my happy little vacation, to see their villages and towns ruined and abandoned, plants crumbling away from neglect and sabotage, the creatures teetering about more nervous and anxious than ever. It also made me glad and guilty at the same time that I had helped my tribe create all these terrible weapons. Without them, my tribe might have

gotten wiped out, as the Southern creatures had formidable weapons of their own. But, with the weapons, they killed more of their fellow creatures than ever had been killed in all of the battles of the past, real and mythological. I felt somewhat responsible for the carnage, and tried to do some private thinking [meditations] to come to terms with this.

In a couple of years, things were pretty much back to normal. We did build a reservoir upstream to cope with the next drought. We built storage sheds in all the villages so each could deal with its own needs during a dry year. We improved the roads and the shipping carts. We built walls around the city and the villages; since the ceramic bricks could be stacked only so high, even with concrete [mortar], the walls were not really like fortresses, but we hoped they would at least discourage or slow down attacks. I experimented with building walls with concrete and rods [reinforced concrete], but we never had enough concrete or aluminum to build a whole city out of them, so it was mostly for show. Increased use of ceramic bricks for building walls did mean that the creatures needed to use just aluminum for all their every-day use, and very few ceramic vats could be made during this time.

And so peace and prosperity returned to our world, and soon there were more and more trades with the other tribes. Our plants grew well. The creatures were happy. I was happy.

Then, during my next trip to the West, I went to sleep one night, and found myself back in this world. I was there almost as long as the months ran with the years twice.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

Updated 11/1/11

13.2 The War

Now, it was well known that the Forest Creatures no longer laid children. The Nameless Ones did, but none of the others did. This was good because there were always other Creatures coming to live with the Forest Creatures. Most were Valley Creatures, but there were many Shore Creatures living with the Forest Creatures who lived near the Shore Creatures, and they laid many, many children for the Forest Creatures. Once a child was born a Forest Creature, the child did not lay children, but started a raising house with a Forest Creature or a Shore Creature or, sometimes, a Field Creature.

Now, many wars were between the Forest Creatures and the Patch Creatures, and many Forest Creatures of the Blamas Clan died in these wars. So in the higher waters of the River East, Forest Creatures were always asking Valley Creatures to come start raising houses with them and lay children with them. Valley Creatures at first were glad to do this, as there were always Valley Creatures who wanted to go live with the Forest Creatures. There were also many Forest Creatures who lived by the River East, and they lived the way of the Forest Creatures some and lived the way of the Valley Creatures some, so some of them could still lay children, and these children often went to fight the wars in the Patch. Since more and more of the Forest Creatures by the River East and the River West were Nameless Ones, more and more of the Nameless Ones also went to fight the wars, although they were only allowed to trade, but they could fight in the war if the trade was refused, and the Patch Creatures always refused trade.

Then there was another dry year, worse than the one before. The Forest Creatures by the River West were good, since they had much food stored in the City, and the Judges' Judges ordered that the stored food be sent back to all the Forest Creatures' villages. They had kept a careful count of the food that everyone had sent to the City, so just that amount was sent back to everyone, except for the stuff that crumbled in the stores.

Now, the Valley Creatures and the Forest Creatures who lived with the Valley Creatures had not been able to send very much to the City, for they did not garden the way the Forest Creatures by

the River West did. They had sent insect meat to the City, but insect meat did not stay, and did not crumble, but turned to Rubber, which could not be eaten. So there was not very much for the City to send back to the villages by the River East.

Lucky For Me, the City had very many fruits left that they had grown themselves, and the Judges of the River East asked the Judges' Judges to send some of these to the Valley, so they would live until the insects returned and the rains returned. The Judges' Judges, always fair in trade, sent a Nameless One, who asked the villages of the River East to send something back for trade.

The villages of the River East and their Judges said, Why should we trade with the City when we are One Creature, when almost all of us are Forest Creatures, and many of us are Nameless Ones and use words.

The Nameless One from the City said, You are not all Forest Creatures, for you also live the way of Valley Creatures and serve their many gods. Most of you are not Nameless Ones, for Nameless Ones are not permitted to gather poop or insect meats, as the Great One decreed this to be so at the Judgment. Still, it's not just the Creatures who live by the River East who must trade. All Cities and villages and Towns and Poles have traded. All Creatures trade with the City. All Creatures only get what they have sent in. This is fair. You now have all that you have sent in. If you need more, you need to send in more.

That seems fair, said the villages of the River East and their Judges, But there is nothing here but poop, and we have very little, for the cats do not eat much during a dry year.

The Nameless One from the City said, Then there is nothing I can do, for this is the wayrules as set by the Judges' Judges.

The Judges of the River East decided to go to the City themselves, and said to the Judges' Judge,s We sent all the insect meats that we could send to the City for years and years, and we expect a fair trade.

The Judges' Judges replied, The trade is fair because the insect meat you sent can not be eaten any more, so we can only send you things that can not be eaten.

The Judges of the River East said, There have always been trade of things that can be eaten with things that cannot be eaten. Even Rubber can be traded for something.

The Judges' Judges said they did not need any more Rubber, and Rubber from cut insect meats cannot be woven to be ridden, so it was not really Rubber, and so there was nothing more to

trade.

The Judges of the River East said, Then, send us the fruits for stores, just the same way we sent the insect meats for stores. When the insects return, we can send you the insect meat for trade.

The Judges' Judges said that's not a trade, for the wayrules say only the City can keep fruits for stores. You have to send something for trade now, if you want the fruits.

The Judges of the River East said, We have nothing to send. What do you want.

The Judges' Judges didn't know what to say. They said, We need to talk about this, and sent the Judges of the River East back.

What did the City need? The City had everything. The City had fruits. The City had Blamas leather. The City had Field Creature leathers and Patch Creature leathers. The City had bricks and vats. The City had sticks and stones. The City had carts and wheels and weapons. The City could not refuse to trade, so the Judges' Judges needed to know what The City needed.

The City needed children.

So the Judges' Judges sent fruits to the East River. When the Valley Creatures and Forest Creatures came to get the fruits so they could eat, the Nameless Ones of the City spoke to the Nameless Ones of the Forest Creatures that lived with the Valley Creatures, and said, We know what we need in the City. We need children. This is a fair trade.

Now, in the trading signs, there was no meaning for children. In words, tho, there is a word for children. But it was not right to trade children because there was no meaning in trading sign for children, because no one wanted to trade children, not even the meat of the insect children. No one ate children. No one used children to keep fruits in. No one used children to cloth the Great One, not even the children of the Field Creatures, for they made no leather during the long sleep.

How many children do you want, asked the Nameless Ones of the East River.

How many fruits do you want, asked the Nameless Ones of the City, You give us the children who can carry the fruits.

No, said the Nameless Ones of the East River. We cannot give you our children. We gave you all the children you needed, and they went to fight the Patch Creatures. You never traded us for those children. When you trade for all those children, we will trade for more children.

Ah, said the Nameless Ones of the City, they are dead now, so they cannot carry anything. We will not give you anything for trade for the dead children.

Then we will not give you any children for trade, said the Nameless Ones of the East River.

In all the villages, it was the same, one after one. The Nameless Ones and Judges and Teachers of the river East would not trade their children. In fact, they already knew that the Nameless Ones of the City were coming to ask for children, and had all decided together that none of the villages of the East River would give the City any of their children. What is the point, they thought, since they would all go to the City and eat out of Metal vats and no longer have children of their own. The City would come again to get more children, and who would then get the poop and insect meats?

So, as was the way of the Forest Creatures when trade was refused, they started a war. They came in great numbers and killed the Valley Creatures in the night, every one of them, and took all their children, dead and alive, and left a fair trade of fruits in the empty village. Village after village the Forest Creatures did this, and Valley Creatures were afraid and hungry, but they wanted to fight back.

Now, the Forest Creatures who lived with the Valley Creatures were still Forest Creatures. They belonged to Forest Creature clans, and many of them were Nameless Ones. The Blamas Clan Forest Creatures, even by the River East, threw metal stones and ate from Metal vats if they had any. They had sticks that threw stones and carts with wheels that could kill many Creatures in one ride, although these were not very useful by the River East, for the hills were steep and roads were rough. Still, they were also hungry like the Valley Creatures and they needed fruits to eat and they had helped the Valley Creatures send all the insect meats and poops to the City, and sent many, many of their children to the wars with the Patch Creatures. They were angry. So they fought against the Forest Creatures from the City, every one of them, all the Clans.

Because only sticks and stones could be used by the River East, the wars were the same for both, and many from the City died and many from the River East died. The Valley Creatures knew the hills very well, because they lived there, and went over the hills to the River West and attacked the Forest Creatures living in small villages and took their fruits. The City sent more fruits to the villages, and the Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends came and took them. The City

sent more weapons and more Blamas Clan warriors, and the Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends died in great numbers, then they took the weapons and the Forest Creatures died in great numbers.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

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14.2 The End

Among the Valley Creatures who lived closest to the Shore Creatures, there lived a very young Shore Creature who was learning to be a Teacher, and was almost as good a Teacher as any Forest Creature that lived among the Valley Creatures, and also as good as great many Forest Creature Teachers. It is now called Sikssim, which means last to do, for it was the last Teacher among the Shore Creatures who ever learned the words from the Forest Creatures. When it heard that the Forest Creatures were attacking the Valley Creatures and the Forest Creatures of the River East, it prepared to return to the Shore, for the wayrules of the Shore Creatures said that they should not be involved in a war. As It Was, there were very few Shore Creatures who lived with the Forest Creatures any more, since the March that was turned away, for the Shore Creatures now believed that the Forest Creatures no longer lived the way of the Great One. Sikssim was interested in learning the words better, so it had lived with the Forest Creatures who lived among the Valley Creatures. When the Forest Creatures and the Forest Creatures who lived among the Valley Creatures were in a war, it was time for all Shore Creatures to leave.

The Valley Creatures, however, did not want Sikssim to leave. They knew the Shore Creatures were not still living the way of war, but they thought the Shore Creatures remembered good ways of war, and besides Shore Creatures were larger and stronger than any of the other Creatures, and thought Sikssim could stay and help them in the war.

Sikssim said, No, I cannot stay for it is against our wayrules to be in a war.

Is it not true, the Valley Creatures said, that you can start a war to end a war? Is this not what the Shore Creatures had done?

No, said Sikssim, It is right to end a war, but you cannot start a war to end a war.

Then, end this war, they said, by helping us.

This made some sense to Sikssim, but it decided that it was too young and not learned enough to make this decision. It had not even laid children, and so was very young, and could not decide what was the way of the Great One or not, or so it thought. So it left.

To return to the Shore, tho, Sikssim had to follow the river, and the place where the River West and the River East met. Many Forest Creatures lived there and were prepared well for war. Since the March that was turned away, the Judges' Judges thought the Shore Creatures may start a war, and so the Blamas Clan warriors were very prepared by the river that flowed to the Shore.

When Sikssim went to a Forest Creature village and asked for kindness, a Nameless One met him, and took him to a house. Sikssim was asked to stay in this house until the war was over. Now, Sikssim did not think this was fair, for the wayrules of the Shore Creatures, which was the wayrules of the Great One, did not let him stay anywhere for a war. It tried to explain this to the Nameless One, but the Nameless One said it is against its wayrules to let Sikssim go.

But, it is against my rules for me to stay here, and so I must go, said Sikssim, and he tried to leave.

The Nameless One tried to stop it, and in the tussle, Sikssim hit it too hard and killed it.

The villagers were afraid and ran away, and soon Blamas Clan warriors came to kill Sikssim, and Sikssim ran away as fast as it could, back up the river East to the Valley Creature village.

Soon Sikssim arrived at the village where it had lived with the Forest Creatures and the Valley Creatures, and with it came all the Blamas Clan warriors. They brought with them many sticks and stones.

The Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends gathered all the Metal sticks and stones they had and all the weapons they had, and they had many because they lived near Shore Creatures, and went to save Sikssim. A great battle started, and many Creatures died.

Sikssim did not know what to do. The Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends were dying because they were trying to save Sikssim. Sikssim was the cause of this battle, and yet it was not allowed to start a war.

And, still, it tried to not start a war, but it did start this war, and, To Bad For Me, Sikssim was already in a war. It no longer mattered that it was against the wayrules to start a war. The war was already started.

But, did Sikssim have to do something? Yes, it decided, these are my friends, and they are helping me. I need to help them.

So Sikssim picked up as many stick and stones it could find and started throwing them at

the Forest Creatures. Sikssim found a cart that threw sticks and stones, and it was not used by anyone because the roads were too rough in the hills, but Sikssim was strong enough to push it, and it pushed it as hard as it could down the hills, and the Valley Creatures and their Forest Creatures friends screamed and rode on the cart to throw the stick and stones, and great many Forest Creatures died, and they all ran away.

So the Forest Creatures then attacked the Shore Creatures, for it was clear to them that the Shore Creatures had started a war. Now, the Shore Creatures did not have Metal weapons, but they had many sand vattery stones, and they were not hungry like the Valley Creatures, for the dry year did not change the fish or the fruits of the Shore, so they fought very well. The Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends also fought very well because Sikssim was very smart and very strong and knew how to come up with good ideas. Soon, the Valley Creatures and their Forest Creatures were joined by a mighty Shore Creature Judge, now called Hakssim, and many, many Shore Creatures. All the years of peace were good for the Shore Creatures, but some Shore Creatures still spoke of the glory and honor of wars in the days before the Judgments, and so some Shore Creatures wanted to have a war, and were happy to be in a war. None of the Shore Creatures now alive had been in a war, but they were strong, and very big, they knew their sand vattery stones, so they sent the Forest Creatures back to their villages very quickly.

For many months, the Forest Creatures tried to send the Shore Creatures back to their villages, but the Shore Creatures and the Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends did not let them. And the Forest Creatures could not attack anyone any more, not even the Patch Creatures, for many months, and they became very tired of war. This became true all along the border.

So the Judges' Judges came to the Shore and said, Let's not have a war any more.

And Sikssim and Hakssim said, Very well, no more war. That's what we wanted.

Very well, said the Judges' Judges.

Now, said Sikssim and Hakssim, since we won, you have to do what we want.

That is not our way, said the Judges' Judges. We only trade fair. We do not win by war.

Then we will trade, said Sikssim and Hakssim. We will stop the war if you will do what we want.

That is not fair, said the Judges' Judges. You need to give us something we can use, and we

will give you something you can use.

That is not our way, but we will take half, said Sikssim and Hakssim. We will stop the war if you let the Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends live the way of the Valley Creatures again. For as long as months ran with the years, there were never dry years or Valley worms when the Valley Creatures lived their way. This must be their way. Forest Creatures live in Forest Creature' land by Forest Creatures' way. Valley Creatures live in Valley Creatures' land by Valley Creatures' way. Shore Creatures live in Shore Creatures' land by Shore Creatures way. We all live our own way, which is the right way of the Great One. It is fair.

That is fair, said the Judges' Judges.

The Forest Creatures were glad because now they did not have to give any stored fruit to the Valley Creatures and their Forest Creature friends. They did not have much more than they needed for themselves for the dry year. They were going to give it to Valley Creatures to be Generous, but they did not have enough for themselves and would have been hungry if the dry year lasted too long.

The Valley Creatures were glad because they did not have to live by the wayrules of the Judges' Judges any more, and the Nameless Ones who lived among Valley Creatures could now live the way of the Valley Creatures and lay Valley Creature children and be happy. Soon, the insects came and the rain came, and the Valley Creatures had enough to eat. They did not garden, but they still had just enough fruit, and insect meats could be stored until insects came again, and there were many mushrooms to keep off the Valley worms, and there was enough poop to trade for more fruits.

The Shore Creatures were not happy. They got into a war, which was against their ways, and enjoyed it, and won it, but now they returned to their way, and they were very confused. They learned the way of the Great One from the Forest Creatures. The Forest Creatures were their Teachers. Now, the Forest Creatures did not live by the way of the Great One as the Shore Creatures knew it. The Forest Creatures had started many wars, and made the Shore Creatures get into a war, too. It appeared, then, that as long as there were Forest Creatures, there would be wars, although the way of the Great One forbade all wars.

The Patch Creatures, we don't know what they thought, for no one could speak to them.

When the rain returned, all the crumbled bodies became dirt, and the Great One returned from the Outlay, and saw that all was well again, and so she left, this time forever. May she be remembered in glory, for Hakssim and Sikssim heard from the Judges' Judges that all that became was all that must become, and that the Great One was satisfied. So Hakssim and Sikssim were now keepers of the words, and the keeper of the Shore Creatures' way, which was the way of the Great One.

And so Hakssim and Sikssim were happy, and the Shore Creatures were happy.

Alone in a Strange World

Jennifer Ariadne Park

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15.2 The Fires

On the day when the Great One departed, there was a great celebration at her Temple, with more dancing and more food than ever. It had been many years since the war ended, and calmness and muchness had returned to the Forest Creatures' land. There were not as many villages as there had been before the war, and the Forest Creatures did not lay as many children, and the trades had changed to be very little. Still, the fruits were many, the Blamas leather was strong and good, and Forest Creatures had many sticks and stones. The Great One left them with only one final commandment: be happy. And the Forest Creatures were happy.

Now, the Great One had brought from the Outlay the fruits of the Outlay trees, and made the Outlay trees grow from the ground. The Outlay trees did not grow well in the Forest Creatures' lands near the rivers, but they grew very well in the hills. Soon the hills from which the River West came were covered with the Outlay trees, but they never grew anywhere else. The Outlay trees, which have no names, did not crumble when they died. So the Forest Creatures used the Outlay trees for everything for which they used Metal. Some Judges thought this was foolish, for the Great One had told them really to use Metal for everything, but Metals did not work for everything, and many Forest Creatures wanted to be able to lay children. So they used the Outlay trees for vats and wheels and weapons. They even built carts and houses and walls with the Outlay trees. For the Outlay trees grew fast and plentiful, there was always enough to use. Metal was still used as sticks and stones, for they were the best at killing.

Soon the City was built more with the Outlay trees than with bricks. The Outlay trees did not need to be cooked to be strong like bricks. The Outlay trees did not need to be soaked in mud to be strong like Blamas leather. The Outlay trees could bend, and not crumble, and the Outlay trees could send sticks and stones very far and kill many Creatures. The Outlay trees did not turn to Rubber, and the Outlay trees did not melt into the dirt when it rained. The Forest Creatures were happy with this final gift from the Great One.

One day, all the Forest Creatures could not see well, for the air was full with dirt. The

Forest Creatures could not walk well through the dirt in the air, and when the wind blew strong they fell down and fell asleep. Many Forest Creatures died, until the rain came and cleaned the dirt out. The trees were on fire in the hills, and it burned for many days, and even the rain did not take the fires off the trees. All the trees burned, and the fires made a lot of dirt, and it floated and came down to the rivers where the Forest Creatures lived. The trees that lived before the Great One brought the trees from the Outlay did not burn until they were cut down, and they did not make dirt when they burned, and they burned slowly and very hot. The trees from the Outlay burned quickly, and burned alive and dead, and did not crumble when they died, so many were on the ground, dead and ready to burn.

When the fires were all over, the trees were all gone, every one of them. But, the next year, the trees grew from the ground again, and soon there were more trees than before. After a few years, the trees would burn again, making a lot of dirt, and kill Forest Creatures. The Forest Creatures were not happy when this happened.

Then, a fire started in the City. The fire burned everything in the City. It burned the walls, for they were made of Outlay trees. It burned the houses, for they were made of Outlay trees. It burned the weapons, for they were made of Outlay trees. To Bad For Me, the weapons were everywhere in the City, and so even things that were not made of Outlay trees were burned in the fire, and all the leather that would never burn if it touched fire, still burned because they were kept in walls and vats made of Outlay trees. Even Metal burned in the fire, and melted into the dirt, and the leathers kept in Metal vats all burned in the fire, and could not be read. Even sand vattery made by the Shore Creatures burned in the fire, and melted into the dirt. Bricks dried out and crumbled in the fire, and turned black from the dirt. And soon all the memories put to words in the City were burned, lost forever.

The fires did not stop for many days, and even in the rain the fires did not stop in the City. When the fires stopped, many Forest Creatures could not be found, for they were crumbled in the fires, and were blown with the dirt into the air, and made other Forest Creatures sick and dead, too. Almost all of the Forest Creatures who lived in the City were gone; only some Nameless Ones lived because they were away for a trade. All the Judges and Judges' Judges were gone. The Nameless Ones who lived became Judges and Judges' Judges, and the Judges and Judges' Judges called upon

all the Forest Creatures to come to the City and make the City again.

For many years, the Forest Creatures made the City. They feared using the Outlay trees, for they burned fast, and so they did not use the Outlay trees to make the City. The Great One had not told them to use the Outlay trees for the city, and this was the mistake for which the fire was a punishment. That this was so was proven when another fire started in the Hills, and killed many more Forest Creatures who lived by the rivers, and killed many Forest Creatures who lived in the City. Fires also came to the Towns and Poles and villages, and many Forest Creatures who used Outlay trees died, and all their memories put to words were lost.

So there were not many Forest Creatures left to live, and they all came to live in the City. Still, the fires came to the hills, and dirt came to the City.

When there were only some Forest Creatures left to live together in the City, and they could not make enough food for themselves, they left and joined the other Creatures. Many came to live with the Field Creatures, whose houses had been made again and who so were happy. Many came to live with the Valley Creatures, who did not have many fruits but had many insect meats and so were happy. Many Forest Creatures came to live with the Shore Creatures, who lived the way of the Great One, and so lived very well and very happy. The Forest Creatures brought with them many ways of the Great One, and so made everyone happy even more, for fruits were plentiful everywhere and words were useful for many things.

No one lived where the Forest Creatures lived before, because the fires came and filled the air with dirt. Only the Field Creatures could live close to the City, for their houses covered the rivers and kept their air clean. No Forest Creatures went to live with the Patch Creatures, and no one trades with the Patch Creatures.

And, so the Forest Creatures were happy again, and now there are no Forest Creatures any more. When there are no Forest Creatures, there are no Nameless Ones, and so we are One Creature again, and we speak the words for trade and for learning, but keep our memories in meanings, and put the memories to words to know that words are lies, and because words remain and memories fade.

Here I wrote the words, not to glorify the world with words, not to glorify words with the world. Readers beware that words are corrupt and untrue. Yet memories fade and words remain.

Truth fades and lies remain. So I wrote the lies, so may the memories be kept even in corruption.