

# 1 : Finding of the Creature

A sound of moaning woke Taylinn up. She slipped out from the covers of her bed and peeked out her door. Her friends were snoring downstairs. Taylinn stepped onto the landing and went past her sister's bedroom and up a short flight of stairs to their mother's room. With the door cracked slightly open, her mother looked to be in a restless sleep again. Taylinn sighed. Ever since last month when their baby brother was snatched away, their mother had been in a state. She blamed Mer-Dragons but she knew better than to bring up such a tale of fantasy.

“What are you doing?”

She turned to find her sister, Avigale. “Just couldn't sleep, so I'd thought I check on her. I thought I heard her moaning.”

“I'd hear her, if she did,” Avigale said.

*I blame it on my heightened hearing, which you don't have.*  
“Your right.”

“Better get back to bed. In a couple hours we have school and I'm sure we want to get in some band practice before going.” She glanced at the dark lumps spread out on the floor and on the bench. “She'll be all right.” Avigale descended the stairs toward her bedroom.

Taylinn followed Avigale and disappeared back into her own bedroom. *I hope you're right*, she thought as she closed the door. Taylinn was about to get back into bed when her pointed ears twitched to a noise outside. She pulled her curtain open and stared out into the night. The bright stars gleamed onto the grass of Ethreal below. A cool wind brushed past her milky white fur, and her eyesight, another blessed or cursed trait, caught movement among the trees in the far-off forest. Something was in there that didn't belong. Perhaps the one that kidnapped her baby brother. Taylinn took her white cloak from the closet, wrapped it around her fur, and leapt through the windowless window to the ground, then took off on all fours, like a cheetah.

Taylinn stood at the threshold of the forest and peered through the huge and eerie trees, casting blotting shadows on the ground. Her tail tapped the ground, trying to sense if anything was amiss. Walking along the dirt pathway, she held the edges of her cloak up, hoping the bottoms wouldn't drag into any mud puddles. Her Parents would surely disapprove of their eight-year-old daughter being out at this hour. *I know I saw something out here*, Taylinn thought, cautiously scanning the area. She kept her ears and eyes sharp for any movement. Unlike the rest of the Elousen race, her heighten sense was normal for her. It seemed that she was the only one that had it.

Her ears picked up on the slightest noise. Frogs croaking happily, insects joyfully singing, owls softly hooting. Her light-blue eyes pierced through the darkness, enabling her to see rather well. The ground began to sparkle with strands of grass around the trees, she hoped it was from her heighten vision and not from the sunlight. Upon hearing a rustle in some bushes, she turned and saw a creature jump high into the tree above. Taylinn only got a glimpse of the creature, but she clearly saw it had no tail. She knew she had to get back home before her family woke, but she had to investigate. Dropping to all fours, her hands and feet sprang her down the trail, following the chatter of the trees until she stumbled and rolled head over feet onto her back.

Looking around, Taylinn realized she stood surrounded by trees that enclosed tighter to the pathway. An area she was unfamiliar with. When she stopped panting, her ears focused on the noise above. But the sound she heard didn't come from the trees. Looking at her feet she saw what made her collapse onto the ground. A piece of clump of dirt sat in the pathway. Taylinn stared at the patch and noticed it was fresh dirt. She made claws come out of her finger and she began to dig. The dirt gave way to form an opening. She peeked inside to find a mop of black hair attached to a small body. The being was laying on its belly. Picking up a stick, Taylinn poked at the lumpy form causing it to moan. She jumped back as her heart skipped a beat. Throwing the stick away, Taylinn raced out of the woods.



She sneaked her way across the field, cautiously so not to be seen by anyone she knew. Taylinn hid among tall grass and stones. Dropping to all fours she ran across the dirt to a hole in the ground. Climbing down the ladder quietly so not to wake her friends she crept down three rounded steps, through the darkness among the sleeping lumps on the floor and up the stairs to the landing and stood in front of her sister's door. Quietly she opened the door and entered the dark room. Unlike her own room, Avigale didn't have a balcony to let the sunlight in. The room brightened slightly nevertheless. Taylinn stepped over some cloaks that laid folded on the floor. She went to her sister's bedside and gently nudged her awake, Avigale opened her eyes.

"What is it?" she asked.

"You need to come with me, Avi," Taylinn said.

Avigale struck a match and lit the wick of a candle that sat on the nightstand. "Where?"

"No time to explain." Taylinn shot out of the bedroom and down the stairs. But when she reached the bottom she tripped over one of her friends.

"Ouch!" cried Dotty.

"I'm sorry, Dot," Taylinn said, standing back up.

Dotty stood rubbing her head. "What's the hurry?"

"Tay, slow down," her sister's piercing blue eyes glared at her while Avigale came down the stairs, wearing her cloak.

"There's something out there in the forest and I don't want it getting away."

"Shhh...trying to sleep," William mumbled.

"An adventure in the middle of the night?" Dotty asked, raising her voice a little and clapping her hands. "How exciting."

"Dot, quiet. We have to get up early, so we can practice before school," Leroy stated in a gruff tone.

"Shhh," Taylinn said, turning on her, "wake up our mom why don't you?" She rolled her eyes.

"At this hour?" Avigali asked, "You're crazy."

"Please, there's something you have to see," Taylinn pleaded. At first, her sister looked up the stairs toward their mother's closed door. Taylinn prayed she wouldn't call her.

"What's in the forest?" Avigale asked.

Taylinn sighed with relief.

Leroy, nine-years-old stood. He threw his pillow at Taylinn. "You can wake the dead."

William, older than his brother and sister, stood next. "What's the fuss about?"

Taylinn led them above ground. Racing to the forest, she brought them to the deep part of the woods, where she'd tripped on the lump and encountered the mystery thing.

The other four children all stopped abruptly at seeing the dugout mound.

"What's in there?" Leroy asked. He squinted inside as so did the other three. Avigale and Dotty both gasped and backed away.

"Is it alive?" William asked.

"Only one way to find out," Leroy said. He thrust his arms and head into the hole and struggled to pull the creature out.

Taylinn swallowed. *Is this the right thing to do? What if it's dangerous?*

Leroy stepped up to it slowly, despite the girls' protest and rolled it onto its back. Its face looked like theirs, with the exception of being covered in dirt, but it had no fur on its body. Just a bunch of brown fur on top of its head. It also had no tail.

Taylinn took a quick glance around. *This isn't the same creature that I saw?* She swallowed. *That means it is still out here.*

"Is there something else?" Avigale asked. "How did you know to come out here?"

"We should get this thing home before mom wakes up and finds us missing," Taylinn said.

The creature began to float away from the ground. Leroy's tail stretched wrapping itself around the creature and they all started heading for home. "It's not even heavy."

"It's turning out to be an interesting sleepover," William said.

Dotty walked alongside her brother, staring up at the creature's face with wide eyes. "I think I've seen it before on the Vision Box, I think it's what they call a hu-main? How did it get here though?"

*How indeed? Could Nimus have brought it here?* Taylinn wondered.

## 2 : Myths

The children entered the hole.

“Good, mother’s not up yet,” Avigale said.

Leroy laid the creature on the bench in the middle of the living room.

“Children, where have you been? I’ve been looking all over the place for you.”

Taylinn and Avigale turned toward their mother who came down stairs from their bedrooms, her cloak flanking her. By the suns light they saw a scowl across her face.

“Mother, you should take a look,” Avigale squeaked as they all moved away from the bench.

Ellen, upon approaching the bench, threw her hands onto her face with shock. “What—what is that?” Her breathing became heavy. While she stared at the creature with horror, Avigale explained. A moan came from the creature. Their mother’s eyes softened. “It’s only a child,” she whispered. Sitting down next to it, she checked the creature over and felt its wrist.

“It’s weak but steady. It seems to be all right.” Ellen confirmed.

Taylinn poked at its smooth legs. “How ugly. It’s so pale and has no fur.”

Leroy looked at the other children with excitement. “It may be ugly but it’s also cool. A real life hu-main. Wait till the other kids hear about this at school.”

Ellen grabbed Taylinn’s hand away. “No one will tell this to anyone until we figure out what to do. You all understand?” They all nodded and mumbled disappointments as her eyes narrowed at them. “I should contact your mother though,” she said to Dotty and her brothers.

“What can she do?” Dotty asked.

Standing she flipped a switch for the lights to come on and dug through drawers in the kitchen. "Maybe help me with him? I don't really know." Taking out a pad and pencil, she scratched something down then stuffed it into an envelope with shaky hands. "But I trust her." She walked over to a little door in a wall. Pressing a button, the wall opened, and she laid the envelope in before it was whisked away into the darkness. "You should get ready for school."

In a few minutes, the kids emerged from the hallway to feet, legs covered in dark white fur, and a tail coming through the entrance of the home. A voice called down.

"Ellen, is everything okay? Are my children misbehaving again?" Karla asked, climbing down the ladder. She carried a basket on her arm.

"Thank you for coming immediately," Ellen said. "It's my girls who are misbehaving this time and enlisted your kids to help. They found something in the forest this morning..."

But just then they heard Avigal's voice squeak, "It's waking up, Mother."

Karla blinked at the lump on the bench and jumped behind Ellen, causing fruit to fall out of her basket. "What...?"

"As I was saying," Ellen spoke in a whisper, "the children found this creature in the forest."

The creature was obviously trying to focus its oval eyes on its surroundings. Ellen moved to the bench very slowly with Karla close behind. The creature rubbed its eyes with a skinny hand. "Can you speak?"

Silence fell upon them once more as the creature's head moved side to side, its brown eyes searching about. Then the creature spoke.

"Where am I?" It asked in a high voice. "Mom, Dad, where are they?" Its body began to shake.

*Has to be a boy,* Taylinn thought.

Her mother slowly put a hand on top of his knee and knelt down. "Our children found you in the forest. My names Ellen. Do you have a name?"

But it was no use, for he began to cry and whisper over and over. "Mom. Dad."

Ellen turned to Karla. "What do you think we should do?"

Karla's body trembled. "Um, call Jasper, call the doctor," she said, giving a shrug.

"Yes, Jasper will know what to do. That's if..." Ellen shook her head. "Well, if he's not busy."

"It feels so strange," Dotty said, poking at him along the arm.

"Don't poke at it dear." Ellen said, "You should start heading off to school."

They all mumbled and sighed.

"Now do as you're told," Karla said, licking her lips and trying to look firm as usual but Taylinn could see how scared she was.

"Remember, no talking about this with the other kids."

They all mumbled in agreement climbing the ladder. *Leave it to mom to ruin the fun.*

The grass sparkled from the sun as they followed a path headed toward a huge hill. Further in the distance beyond the hill, five brown mountains towered over the land. Making their way up the path, the children discussed what the creature could be while on occasion slicing tall grass with their claws to make a path before them.

"So, how's your mom doing?" Dotty asked strolling next to Avigale. "After, you know."

"I'm just glad she made friends with your mom to talk to," Avigale said. "Seems like dad's always working lately."

"Can you believe that we found a real hu-main," Leroy said again. "Do you think it came from Earth, like those that we see on the Vision Box?"

"I think Earth is in another galaxy?" Avigale said.

"I wonder if the Mage would know how it got here?" Taylinn suggested.

All four laughed.

"She isn't a real Mage. There's no such thing," Avigale said.

"Yes, she is!" Taylinn snapped.

"Sure, there is," William said. "I've seen them on the Vision Box, like that one that helped that king with the sword."

Everyone laughed again, except for Taylinn who crossed her arms.

"The creature felt kind of rubbery," Dotty said. "His face is so cute. I wonder how he came all the way out here from Earth?"

“Earth isn’t real,” Taylinn said. “And how can you say he’s cute. He’s the ugliest thing I’ve...” she stopped when her sister elbowed her.

They were joined by other children coming from different directions. Taylinn waved at one of them. “Hey Spotty,” she called out running up. “You done with your homework?”

Sarama, with white-grey fur, was nicknamed for the spots along her tail. “Your done with yours? It only took me an hour,” she said in a sing-song tone.

Taylinn stared at her, mouth agape. *Show off. Wait till I tell you what I found.* Opening her mouth, she fell silent. *Oh yea.*

“Well...at least I started a band.”

Spotty grinned. “How’s it coming? My sister would like to...”

But she trailed off as they descended through a wider path, approaching a half round entrance underneath the hill where a tall Elousen stood outside, his face hidden in the shadows from the sun making him look ominous, especially with scars covering his face, his tail that beat softly against the rock bottom hill also showed scars. He had his hands behind his back eyeing the class. His color matched perfectly with his name. Mr. Grey. “Are you ready?” he asked slowly but with a strong voice. “Then let’s begin.” He ducked into the hole, his purple robe swished around, and the children followed down the steps that went on forever.

After the last step the hallway widened to a large cave with some candles wedged into holes of the jagged rock above them. Arriving at a big stone at the far end, with a door in the middle, Mr. Grey held the door open leading to a classroom.

Inside, long tables with benches were lined in rows. A couple of candles hung from the low rocky ceiling, lighting up the quartzite walls of the room. Mr. Grey went to the front of the class where he stood behind a desk and began writing on the blackboard while the children took their seats. *LaTaras.* “I know you all studied.”

Taylinn looked around to her friends. *Most likely I’m the only one that didn’t study.* To her amazement only a few held their hands high, including Avigale, William, and Leroy. The rest either raised their hands to their shoulders or looked embarrassed like her and Dotty.

Mr. Grey's eyes narrowed with a frown. "I expected better than this." Slowly he started to pace the room. "If you have studied you can tell me what the legend says lives on the planet nearest to us, LaTaras. Terrell?"

A child in black fur stood. "It says Elousen once lived on the planet but then escaped to Ethereal due to disasters."

Avigale raised her hand. When Mr. Grey nodded, she spoke. "There's no proof, so that means it's just a myth, right?"

Mr. Grey walked up to her. "Why is it some stories you believe and some you don't?"

"There's no proof of space ships, either," Taylinn said, "but there might have been at one time."

Avigale looked as if she were about to say something but she was interrupted by Mr. Grey, who said, "Just remember just because something is fiction now doesn't mean it can't still be grounded in fact. Now let's enjoy some play time."



Taylinn, her sister and friends gathered around in a circle in the sun while the other children played on the play structures and played with balls.

"You think the creature could have come from LaTaras?"

Dotty asked while pulling up grass.

"Don't know," Avigale said. "Even though it's right above us, how'd it get here? There was no space ship around it."

"What do you think our mother's doing with that creature right now?" Leroy asked.

"Don't know," Avigale said.

"My tail senses that creature is dang..." Taylinn stopped speaking when Spotty approached them.

"What's up, Spot?" Leroy asked.

"Are you almost ready to perform for everyone?" she asked sitting cross legged.

“I think we’ll be ready to perform in a few months,” Avigale said. “It depends on what comes up.”

“It also depends if Lee and Will don’t have another fight,” Dotty said. “Mom yelled at them saying if they fought again they won’t be in the band.”

“Thanks tattle-tail,” Leroy said, “Besides, he started it.” Leroy tilted his head toward William. “He always wants his way.”

As the two argued Taylinn had her hands wrapped around her knees, looking off toward the forest. “You okay?” Avigale put her hand on Taylinn’s shoulder. “Is there something else out there?”

Before Taylinn could respond, Mr. Grey came up to them. In his hands Taylinn saw a folded letter.

“You four are excused for the rest of the day. You’re to head to the community to the Administrations,” he said.

Taylinn eyed Avigale as they all headed off the grounds. They all knew what this was about.

### 3 : The Administers

Moments later, Taylinn, her sister, and friends were in a huge cave underground. The tunnel that they walked along was wide. Other Elousen's pass by, different shapes and sizes with different colors of fur. Some even spoke in different language. Taylinn's ears picked up snatches of conversations here and there.

"That thing should be imprisoned. It might be dangerous," a dark chocolate Elousen mumbled as he walked by.

A small group of brown and white furs were talking together.

"It may be harmless," a female said.

"Then again, it might have been sent here by the Fay goddess to punish some of us," a male said. "Maybe a Mer-Dragon in disguise."

"You worry too much, Wort," the female said. "I'm sure the goddess sent it so we can learn something."

Within a group of kids passing by, they were discussing the creature as well. "I touched its arm," a kid with blue fur said, his spiked fur caught her attention. "I think we could be friends."

"Why would you want to be friends..." But then Taylinn stopped walking when they reached an arch doorway. A few Elousens stood outside the door. The nearest pressed their ears against the wooden door. Others whispered.

"Don't smell right if you ask me," an elder Elousen said in an accent.

A girl stood in front of Taylinn and her friends. "Have you heard what's behind those doors?"

"Yeah," Taylinn said, while rubbing her shoulder. "We found it last night."

Someone grabbed Taylinn by the hand. It was the elder one. "You brought this thing here? I hope it doesn't give us any diseases."

Avigale slapped his hand away with her tail. “Let us pass. He’s not dangerous.” She led her sister and friends through the wooden double doors. On the other side, sat a table with four Elousens facing them, all wore velvet robes. Two Elousens sat opposite of the group. One was Taylinn’s mother and the other, a gray Elousen, her father, Jasper. On the other side of her mother sat the human child they found.

It took a minute for Taylinn’s eyes to adjust coming into a bright room. The lights made the walls and floor look gold. *Was this the only way to see dad?*

“I still can’t believe it,” a female said. Her tale, cinnamon color ran across the creature’s hands and head as he giggled.

“Please, Sandy,” an elder with black fur said. His reddish-brown eyes narrowed. His elbows rested on the table with his hands folded.

“Sorry, Pickworth,” Sandy said, withdrawing her tail to a normal length. “Forgive me, we’ve just never seen anything like you.”

“Tha—That’s okay,” the child said.

One Elosen motioned for the other children to join them. Taylinn recognized Nimus, her bright eyes looking in awe of the creature. “Debrah, can you please get us some more seats for our guest?”

One Elousen stood. He was rounder than the rest and his stomach bounced as he went and got more stools. He returned to his seat by Nimus.

“Why aren’t you afraid of us?” Pickworth asked.

“On our planet Elousens and humans live together,” the human said.

“Most intriguing,” he whispered. “Here we only know humans from books and on screen.” He leaned back against the wall.

“Sandy.”

Sandy picked up a parchment that laid before her. She looked around at the children as they sat. “So, I’m told you found this creat—this child, is that correct?”

“Yes,” Taylinn said. “I found him under some dirt at three this morning.” Taylinn regretted what she said when she saw her mom’s scrawling eyes on her.

“His name is Sinya,” Sandy said reading from the parchment. “And he comes from Earth. Is that correct?” she asked with a smile.

“Yes, it is,” Sinya said.

“I knew it,” Leroy said.

Sandy cleared her throat.

“Sorry,” Leroy said.

Sandy looked at Sinya. “And you have no idea how you got to be here?”

“No,” Sinya said. “I just woke up here.” He began to squirm in his seat until Ellen rested a hand on his shoulder. “We almost done? I got to go to the bathroom.”

Pickworth smiled at him. “We are, but we shouldn’t have you tramping around here. It’s clear you’re not dangerous to our community but I think some would say different. I think you should stay here for the time being while we try to locate your planet.”

“I could take, Sinya and care for him for a while,” Ellen said.

Taylinn swallowed. *Anything but that.*

Pickworth sighed. “I know you could but what of those that don’t trust him? It could put your family in danger?”

A profound silence filled the room.

“I am trained in the fighting arts. I’ll protect them,” Jasper said.

“Granted,” Pickworth stood. “But only use it if you must. You know the Fay goddess law. Meanwhile we’ll try and figure out where this Earth is.” He then turned toward Nimus, “You have anything to add? Any visions or the sorts?”

Nimus shook her head. “Not at the moment.” She grabbed her long stick and stood.

They all went through the double doors back out into the hall where a group of Elousens were waiting, some not looking to please that they’d be housing a creature.

“Let them pass!” Pickworth called out.

The same elder Elousen that grabbed Avigale’s hand spoke out, “You lot should have left him where he was to die. He would have done the same.” Then he stalked away.

One Elousen approached Ellen, leaned close toward her face. “Just because you can’t get over your son’s loss does not mean that thing will ever replace my grandson.”

“I don’t want to replace Jack. Sinya has no place to go in a strange world and I’m just helping out.” She brought her voice down to a whisper through clenched teeth. “It’s not like I forgot what happened.” He marched off. His black cloak swaying from side to side. Ellen’s mouth fell open.

Sinya looked like he was dancing then looked up at Ellen. “Oh, yes.” She then looked at Jasper. “Jasper, could you take Sinya to the bathroom? Does anyone else have to go also?”

“No,” Taylinn and Avigale both said.

*At least dad will be around more,* Taylinn thought. She saw a purple robe going in the direction that her dad and Sinya were headed. *Wish I could have found what else is in that forest. Nimus. She’ll know what else is in the forest.* “Oh, I mean yes.”

Jasper led Sinya and Taylinn down the hall. They stopped in front of a curtain that coved a small room. Sinya went in.

“Daddy, I missed you,” Taylinn said.

“I missed you too, baby,” he said, “all my girls.” He squeezed her then tickled the girls’ stomach with his tail as they giggled.

Taylinn looked up when he was done. “When are you...?” but Nimus was stalking up to them leaning on her long stick that echoed with each tap on the stone floor while gazing with large round eyes and a grin at Taylinn. Nimus made a gesture with her head. “Wait for Sinya,” her father said, then went up to Nimus.

Taylinn crossed her arms watching them step away off to a corner. Her ears twitched to listen in. She knew she shouldn’t use her heightened sense to ease drop, but she did anyway. Nimus gripped the stick with both hands, long sharp claws wrapping around each other and leaned on it. “I didn’t see anything on the ship before I buried it.”

Jasper was silent for a moment. “Could that mean there’s more humans on the planet? Could Earth have ships that go this far out by now?”

Taylinn saw Nimus grin and nod. “A lot could have changed since our last encounter there.” Nimus’s large jaded eyes moved toward Taylinn. “We’ll talk later.” Once again, she moved down the hall. Taping her stick as she went.

# O

After Taylinn got out of the bathroom, she found her mother, Karla and her friends waiting. Her father took her mother's hand. "I have something I want to show you all," Jasper announced. Leading them down the stone hallway, candles and lights hung from the ceiling to guide their way. As the tunnel bend left, stairs descended to meet them.

The air was colder as they made their way to the bottom of the spiral staircase. Sinya's teeth were knocking together. Ellen draped her arm around his shoulder, covering him with her cloak.

"Thank yo—you." The stone floor became dirt.

Taylinn looked at him and remembered her mom doing that to her when her fur was first coming in at six. The air was a little chilly down here, Taylinn admitted to herself but didn't want to agree with the—the human. So, she braved the cold. The tunnel opened into a cave, leading to a stone wall lined with what looked to be like spigots.

"What are they?" Karla asked.

Jasper strolled over to the end of the row and rested his hand on a small wheel embedded into the wall. "Watch." He cranked the wheel. At the same time water started flowing out of each led spigot.

Everyone murmured.

"It's beautiful," Ellen whispered.

"It is, isn't it? We finally have running water."

"They're faucets."

They all stared at the human. "How do you know?" Taylinn asked.

"That's what they're called on Earth."

Taylinn, her sister and friends walked up to the faucets and each cupped their hands to catch the water and pour it over themselves.

Sinya slowly approached. "Come on," Dotty said, holding her hand out toward the creature. He took it slowly and Dotty pulled him down next to her. She poured water on his head, but he

knocked her hands away. Seeing her mother frown, Dotty didn't do it again. All the children pawed at him.

Taylinn rolled up his sweater sleeve. "His arm feels like our face," she stated.

"His skin is a lot smoother than what you'd think from the Vision Box," Leroy said.

"Children leave..." Karla whispered something to Taylinn's mother. "Leave Sinya alone."

Taylinn stared at her father, who now was talking to her mother and Karla. *How does he and Nimus know about this human? What is this ship they talked about?*

## 4 : Sinya

When they went back home, Sinya sat on a wooden stool at an oak round table with Dotty, Avigale, and Taylinn. Leroy and William each picked up a round interment with strings running down a long neck. They sat on the bench. Sharp claws extend out of their fingernails, and they picked at the strings at the round base while their other hand moved up and down the neck.

“You don’t need to pick those noise makers up every chance you get,” Karla told them.

Leroy looked up. “Jasper calls them string—“

“Guitars,” Sinya finished.

“You know about these string machines?” William asked.

“My dad has one. At home it’s called a guitar. I try to play but not very good.”

“Our dad invented them,” Taylinn said.

“I doubt that,” Sinya said.

“He did,” Taylinn shot at him. “He also invented the lights and running water.”

“My dad builds space ships.”

“No such things,” Avigale said.

“Yes, there is. Guess you don’t have them.”

“Ships are just myths.”

Sinya opened his mouth again when Elleen cut in.

“That’s enough, children.”

“On your planet, you don’t float, do you?” Leroy asked. “On the Vision Box, we don’t see humans flying.”

*Stacia says I have an active imagination.* “No. We do just fine above ground. If we want to fly, we have vehicles called airplanes that take us through the sky.”

Dotty’s soft blue eyes were fixed on Sinya while leaning on the kitchen table. “Let’s see your claws.”

Sinya shook his head, *why aren’t I waking up yet*, he wondered.

“Don’t you have claws?” Ellen and Karla were setting the table with plates for lunch. For the first time Sinya really noticed his surroundings. The roof was smooth except for the hole they used for the entrance. The walls were made of solid rock. The living area and kitchen ran together, unlike his house where a wall divides the two. “Does everyone live underground?” he asked.

Dotty’s eyes sparkled bright. “And what do you live in? What is it like where you come from, arth was it?” she asked garrulously.

Her face was just inches away. He scooted back. Dotty played with Sinya’s hands. Her own hands were covered with fur but shaped just like his. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed something slithering on the ground behind Dotty and he sprang to his feet. Sinya gasped when he saw what looked to be a snake strike Dotty.

She spun to look at her mother. “What?” she asked, rubbing her bottom.

“You know what,” Karla’s tail retracted up to its normal size, “Ellen has asked you to stop poking at him.”

“Are you okay?” Ellen asked.

“What was that?” Sinya asked.

“Just my tail,” Karla said, “She doesn’t need to be poking at you.”

Sinya sat down. “I thought it was a snake.”

“What’s a snake?” Avigale asked.

“On Earth it’s an animal that slithers on the ground.”

“I remember seeing those on the Vision Box,” Avigale said.

“What is arth like?” Dotty asked.

“It’s called Earth. We live in round houses above ground. In big cities with cars and roads. Nothing like this.”

“What are these cars?” Leroy asked. “Sounds sweet. Whatever they are.”

*How to explain?* “They look like big metal boxes that hover on the ground. There how we get around, so we don’t have to walk anywhere.”

The children laughed.

Ellen placed sandwiches on their plates. “So, anything coming back yet of how you got here?”

Sinya thought and shook his head. “The only thing I remember is waking up here.”

“You don’t remember how you got into the forest or how long you were there?” Ellen asked, getting some cups from the cupboard and taking a tea kettle and placing it over the fire on a spit.

“Obviously a while. I’m surprised the council didn’t make him bathe right there,” Avigale said, her nose twitching. Taylinn began to laugh then stiffened when she saw her mother’s sharp eyes narrow toward them both.

“You would too if you were in a hole for so long.” He began munching on his sandwich. His babysitter’s words came to him. *One retort doesn’t deserve another.*

“That was not very nice of either of you,” Ellen said, raising an eyebrow at her two daughters. They both apologized. “Okay you two.” She looked at the two children on the bench. “Time to put the noise makers away and eat.”

“Noise makers?” Leroy asked. “They’re called string—I mean guitars.” Putting it down, he stood along with his brother. “I think I like that word better than string machine.”

“My brothers and sisters are trying to start a live band,” William said, taking his seat. “It will be the first one on the planet. We got the idea from Vision Box.”

“What’s a Vision Box?” he asked.

William pointed to a square box that resembled a television. “Funny. We have those too, but we call them TV’s,” Sinya said, then took a sip of some brown liquid that looked like cocoa, which was too hot. *If this was a dream this wouldn’t have burned.*

“Funny name,” Avigale said.

“So, on arth, how many of you are there where you come from?” Dotty asked, “Do you all have so little fur?” She ran her hand over his oily colored hair. “It feels like fur.”

“Dotty!”

She flinched turning toward her mother’s sharp voice. Dotty began eating.

“It’s called Earth. It’s not fur, it’s hair,” Sinya said.

When they’d finished eating, Ellen and Karla took the kids plates to a round bowl made of a sunken rock full of water. Sinya

guessed they used it for their sink, seeing them place the plates within the basin.

“Speaking of playing, you want to get some practice time in?” Avigale said. As the other children agreed they stood and disappeared behind a curtain, Leroy and William picked up their instruments and trailed behind, leaving Sinya with their mothers. *Finally, I can eat*, Sinya thought, picking up his sandwich.

Taylinn poked her head through the curtain and asked, “You’re going to watch us, right Mom?”

“After Sinya’s done with his meal,” Ellen said.

Once he was done, Ellen pulled back the curtain and led Sinya down the hall while Karla followed. They walked on a carpet made of wax. It was a little bumpy at times due to piles of dirt not flattening. The walls were lined with wood paneling, except for a square hole in the wall. Music could be heard behind double doors at the end of the hall, Ellen pushed it open.

The room they were in now was large. The children stood on a wooden platform with instruments in front of them.

Leroy plucked the guitar, which was now plugged into a speaker; making it louder, William’s tail tapped a square device before him. His tail tapped one arear and he used sticks to tap another arear. A beat came out of built in speakers. It sounded like a tap of a symbol and a drum. Dotty stood behind a long narrow device. Her fingers and tail moved across something that looks like a bunch of keys, reminding Sinya of a piano his grandma has in her house. Avigale played an instrument with holes. Her fingers moved up and down along these holes, causing a high pitch to squeal out. Her lips blew into a small hole at the top. Taylinn stood center stage holding a round device, singing into it softly, it too was plugged into a speaker.

Ellen took Sinya onto her lap while sitting next to Karla on stools. Looking up Sinya saw different colors of lights facing the children. Sinya focused on the song Taylinn sang. Now and then her sister would join in.

*I recognize this*. Sinya looked at Ellen and said, “My mom and dad listens to this song on the radio.” *How is it they know a song from my planet?* he wondered.

She wrapped her arms around him. His skin tickled from her furry arms.

“Stacia, my babysitter said I always had a vivid imagination. But I’m not imagining this, am I?” Sinya asked.

“No,” Ellen kissed him on the head, “I’m afraid not.” She jerked her head back in disgust and Sinya wondered if she saw some bugs in his hair from laying in the dirt. “Avi’s right, you need a bath.” She stood, taking Sinya’s hand she led him toward the doors until Taylinn’s voice boomed through the speakers that stood on either side of the stage.

“You said you were going to watch,” she whined into the mic.

“I’ll be back. I’m going to bathe Sinya,” Ellen continued through the doors.

“I think I could play better,” Sinya whispered.

They entered the square hole in the hallway. It looked like the one in the community. The basin he used to wash his hands in, a smaller hole in the ground next to that that they used for a toilet. The only difference was that inches away a larger hole sat in the ground. The light illuminated on the brown water that filled the pit.

“What’s that?” Sinya asked pointing to it.

“It’s what we use to bathe in,” Ellen said.

“We call it a bathtub.”

“That’s a good name for it,” Karla said, standing in the doorway. “I know it’s not much to look at, but it’s clean.”

Ellen touched Sinya’s sweater. “What are these called that you’re wearing?” she asked.

“My clothes?” he asked.

“Do we need to take them off?” she asked.

“Yea.” Sinya began pulling his sweater off when he stopped to look at Karla. “There’s no curtain on this like there was in the last one.”

“We’ll make sure no one else sees and tomorrow I’ll place a curtain up,” Ellen said, helping Sinya out of his clothes and into the water.

“I’ve had dreams that seemed real before, but nothing like this.”

“You’ll find out it’s not a dream after a few days,” Karla said.

After examining his cloths, Ellen took a bar of soap and applied it to a cloth, then began scrubbing Sinya. The water became colder and colder while Ellen and Karla talked.

“So, is Jasper still not coming home for weeks on end?” Karla asked.

“He’s very busy inventing things,” Ellen said. “But he said he’d be home more to help look after Sinya and keep those that thinks he’s dangerous away from him.”

“I—I still don’t understand how no one has seen a human here.” Sinya chattered his teeth and crossed his arms. “I’ll get some warm water for you,” she said before going down the hall.

“Why would we see humans?” Karla asked.

“The Elousen race and human race are both on Earth.”

Karla’s ears widened toward shouting coming from down the hall. “There goes the kids again.” She shook her head. “They knew how to play nice until those things came along.”

Ellen came back with a kettle and a cloth. “Jasper invents some great things,” Ellen said, “but sometimes I wish he didn’t make those noise makers,” pouring in the steaming water.

“I’ll go check on them,” Karla said, and strode out of the room.

“Straight from over the fire,” Ellen said, swishing the water around him with her tail. Taking the soap, she started washing his hair.

“Did you have a son?” Sinya asked.

Ellen stopped scrubbing. “Yes. Just last month he was taken,” she said, pouring water on his head from her hands.

“I don’t want to replace him.”

“You’re not. That was just my father not understanding.”

The sound of arguing voices traveled down the hall when the kids stopped and peered in. Taylinn scowled at him.

*This is what an animal at the zoo must feel like,* Sinya thought.

“I don’t think he cares to be gawked at,” Karla’s voice said from behind them, moving them along.

“I’m sorry for our children’s behavior. For everyone. We’ve never seen a human.” Ellen held out a cloth to dry him. “I’m sure things will be better after you’ve gotten sleep.”

*Maybe I’ll wake up in my own bed,* Sinya thought.

Sinya moved down the hallway wearing a cloak Ellen had gotten for him. “In the morning I’ll wash your clothes,” she said, “I’ll also have Avi take that water out of the hole and put more in.” She held the curtain open for him.

Leroy, William, Avigale, Taylinn and Karla were on the bench, watching TV or the Vision Box as they called it. Dotty sat at the table reading.

“What were you yelling about?” Ellen asked.

Karla and the three children turned while Dotty put her book down.

“They called me a crybaby,” Taylinn said.

“Well you are,” Dotty stated, “we wanted to try a song, but you whined how you didn’t like it. Then you started yelling and crying.”

“Taylinn, you do not yell and cry to get your way,” Ellen said.

“I wasn’t crying,” Taylinn said in a huff. “Why is he wearing my cloak?”

“Because I’m going to wash his clothes tomorrow. Can you fix your cot so Sinya can sleep tonight?”

Ellen headed to the kitchen and began to pull out pots from the cupboard.

“Does he have to sleep in my room? I just arranged my animals?”

“Now,” Ellen said while Karla smacked Taylinn’s leg. She obeyed reluctantly.

Sinya sat next to Dotty, who couldn’t take her eyes off of him until Karla clapped her hands. “We do not stare, young lady.”

Dotty bowed her head and began to twirl her tail around her finger.

“We also do not play with our tail either.”

Dotty went back to her book.

“What book you reading?” Sinya asked.

Dotty put it down. “Tall Tales of Humans.”

Sinya laughed. “That’s one I never heard of.”

Taylinn came back down, announcing, “It’s ready.”

“You want me to stay?” Karla asked Ellen, “If not, my kids have homework to do.” Her kids begged to stay over, but she held up a hand to forestall further protest. “Stop it. You’re all in enough trouble as it is for calling Taylinn names.”

But when Ellen dismissed Karla’s offer she led her kids up the ladder. “I’ll see you tomorrow at school if I survive,” Taylinn called. Ellen cleared her throat and her daughters smile vanished and she sat on the bench.

When their supper of beef and corn was over, and the girl's homework and bath done, Ellen took Sinya upstairs followed by her daughters and led him into a bedroom.

In the dark Sinya could see three short shelves around the room filled with toys such as wooden balls, dolls dressed in cowboy hats and boots. On a dresser sat a collection of stuffed animals neatly in a row. Taylinn took a mouse from this collection and went to her bed.

Ellen laid Sinya on the cot and spread a blanket over him. "Try to get some sleep. We'll see what to do about finding how to get you home in the morning," Ellen said, tucking him in. "If you need anything, Taylinn is right here and she'll come get me."

"You better not get my cloak dirty."

Turning to her daughter she said, "You also get to sleep and don't worry about your cloak." Taylinn took her cloak off and laid down on her bed.

Ellen kissed Taylinn then closed the door behind her.

After a minute, Taylinn spoke, "I'd like to see you do better in the band."

"What?" Sinya asked. "You heard that?"

"Yes."

Sinya licked his lips. "Sorry." *Can't believe I'm saying sorry to a dream.* It took a while before Sinya fell asleep. But when he did, he dreamt he stood outside in a field. Dark figures surrounded him, with drawn guns. A tall woman stood next to him. The figures aimed guns at him and the woman, with her own gun drawn toward the shadower figures. She shoved Sinya to the side and he screamed as he saw red streaks fire at the woman while a light engulfed him.

"Nooo..." he sat up gasping for air. Looking across from him in the dark room, Sinya didn't see a form of Taylinn in her bed. Hearing a creak of the door Sinya pulled the covers to his neck. *Who are they?* he wondered. Sinya's breathing became heavy once again. But then seeing the shadow slip under the covers, his breath became steady. "Taylinn?"

"Did you finally wake yourself?" she asked. "You were moaning so loud I couldn't get to sleep."

"Sorry. Where were you?"

“That’s none of your concern. I have school in the morning so, good night.”

Sinya tried to relax and swallowed. *This is just a dream. I’m still in my own house, right? That’s it. Tomorrow I’ll be in my own house.*

## 5 : More Myth

“Taylinn, time to get up,” a voice said. *Who’s Taylinn?* wondered Sinya, awaking to someone shaking him. His eyes opened to a face that was a blur, *Stacia*, he thought, then saw the snow white furred hand upon his arm. He sat up abruptly and scooted back until his back pressed against the wall. “It’s okay, it’s only me, Ellen,” she said, then turned to the bed behind her, “Get up now, Taylinn. You’ll make your sister and you late again. I told you before to part your curtain to let the sun in so you know when it’s time to wake.” With that a blinding light lit the room.

Sinya remembered who Ellen was and where he was at. A thumping noise resounded in his head. “You—you mean you’re not a dream?” Sinya almost yelled.

Taylinn snickered.

Sinya shook his head.

Ellen glared at Taylinn. “Taylinn, bathroom, now!” Ellen yelled. “You ready to get up?” she asked, looking back at Sinya, “You sleep okay?”

Sinya swung his legs onto the hardwood floor. “I had a nightmare last night.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Ellen said. “Was it bad?”

Taylinn snickered again while putting on her cloak. “I’m surprised you didn’t wake up with him yelling.”

“You didn’t wake me?” she asked, eyeing her daughter.

*Guess I shouldn’t relay on you to help me*, Sinya wanted to say but his tongue felt like led.

Taylinn swallowed. “I—I was going to but then he stopped.” Ellen sat next to Sinya.

Taylinn went downstairs.

Ellen guided Sinya by the hand out of bed. He looked out the window. Green field and meadow stretched out as far as he could see. “I—I thought we were underground. How can there be a window upstairs?”

“We live on a slight hill. The living area is only a few inches in the ground and we made the bedrooms out of the hill side. My husband wanted a quick exit if we ever needed one,” she said. “I doubt we’d ever use it. We live in a peaceful world.” She led him downstairs where Avigale and Taylinn ate breakfast.

A soft glow streamed through the opening of the hole from outside.

“Knock, knock,” a voice called from outside. A tail dropped down the hole, then came a round body with white fur. A dark white than Ellen and her children. “My kids are off to school. Anything you need before I head off to work?”

“You’re ‘oing to watch us play when ‘e get home, right?” Taylinn asked.

“Taylinn, don’t talk with your mouth full,” Ellen said, “And of course I am.” Ellen made what looked to be like carrots and nuts between small pieces of rolled up bread and stuffed them in two bags. “Just trying to get my girls off to school as well.” She then turned toward Taylinn, “Did you wash before eating? You couldn’t have been done that fast.”

“Ready?” Avigale asked. She took a bag from her mother.

Taylinn was about to take her lunch when her mother glared at her. “You wash now, or there will be no playing when you get home.” Taylinn made a sound, smacked her tail on the ground as she marched behind the curtain. Avigale rolled her eyes.

“She’s lucky she’s not mine—” Karla said, scrubbing dishes in the basin sink with a cloth. “I’m doing it again, aren’t I? I’m sorry.”

Sinya looked at the rolled-up bread with what looked to be nuts in the middle.

“Tailrolls,” Avigale said.

“Look like little sandwiches. What’s in it?”

“Nuts, karb, tastes very good.”

Taylinn emerged from the hall, took her sack lunch, then both girls gave their mother a hug and went up and out the hole.

Ellen shook her head. “Wonder if she’ll ever grow up?” She turned her attention on Sinya. “What do you eat at breakfast?”

“Cereal.”

“Cereal?” Ellen repeated. She thought for a moment. “Best we have is bowl of karbs.” She took a bowl next to Karla, searched a

cupboard and brought out a bag of brown chips that resembled, cornflakes. Ellen poured him a bowl, then sat on the bench in front of the Vision Box. The flakes tasted stale and dry, but he wasn't sure if he should complain or not. *I doubt they have milk.*

"My kids can't stop talking about you, especially Dotty. She knows everything about humans. She reads that book and can recall everything she reads at any given moment." She put the plates in the cupboards. "Their father would have been proud." She paused. "Still wish I knew what happened to him." Karla wiped an eye and sat next to Ellen.

*Vanished?* "You don't know?" Sinya asked.

Karla shook her head. "One morning I found him missing and he never returned."

*Wow*, Sinya thought. The chill in the air counteracted the warmth from the sun and Sinya began to shake. "Ellen, I'm cold."

"Let's get you into the pool of water and add some warmth," Ellen said. Sinya heard a beeping coming from the kitchen and saw a flashing light where she had placed an envelope in yesterday. She moved into the kitchen toward the flashing light. She pressed her hand on the wall. The panel opened, and a folded paper slid out.

"What does it say?" Karla asked.

Ellen read the letter. "Jasper will be by to talk to Sinya in a little bit." She looked at Sinya. "Let's get you cleaned up," she said, taking the kettle from over the fire pit. Karla followed with Sinya next to her.

*Maybe they found a way home?* Sinya thought, his heart skipped with joy.

Afterward, Sinya wanted to put his clothes back on but Ellen wouldn't allow it, saying they were too rank and gave him a thicker cloak to keep the chill off. She gathered bundles of cloaks into a basket with Sinya's clothes. "You have anything needs washed?" she asked Karla.

"No," Karla said, picking up a wicker basket. "But I do need food."

Heading out of the hole they saw a gray Elousen approach them, a red cloak trailed behind. It had something hanging out of its mouth. Once the sun was out of Sinya's eyes, Sinya

recognized him as the one he met at the meeting. The Elousen held a wooden pipe in his mouth.

“Jasper, I didn’t think you would be home this early,” Ellen said.

His eyes narrowed at Sinya. “Come on back to the house,” Jasper said.

Once inside, Jasper hovered about Sinya while puffing on his pipe. “Do you remember how you got here yet? Was anyone with you when you came here?”

“Uh, no, I was alone. I don’t remember how I got here,” Sinya said, shivering on the bench.

“Mmm,” Jasper paced while taking puffs. “You sure you’re not blocking anything out?”

Sinya swallowed. “Yes.” *Hope I didn’t do something wrong.*

“Jasper please, what’s with all the questions?” Ellen asked, resting a hand on Sinya’s shoulder.

Jasper eyed Sinya for a moment and said, “We can’t find Earth anywhere.”

“You think he’s lying?”

Sinya looked up at Ellen he felt tears coming to his eyes. His heart began to race. *I’m not lying.* But he couldn’t get the words to come out.

“I don’t want to say that. I just don’t see how he could have come here if there is no Earth. If there was some other explanation...”

Sinya remembered his dream of being chased and told them about how he entered some sort of machine with a blinding light.

Jasper’s eyebrows rose at this. Then he began firing questions. “A machine? What did it look like?”

“I don’t remember,” Sinya said.

“You don’t believe this, do you Jasper?” Ellen asked. “There isn’t a machine around here.”

But Jasper only stood still with his chin in his hand. “I’ll see you tonight.” His cloak whooshed on the ground, turning to go when Avigale, Taylinn, Leroy, Dotty, and William all entered the home.

“Daddy,” Taylinn yelled, throwing her arms around her father. “Guess what, we took a test today at school and I think I passed. We’re learning about the solar system. We’re studying LaTaras

first. It's said that Elousens used to live there a long time ago. You've come to watch us practice?"

"I'm afraid not. I have to get back to a meeting. I've just come by to get some information from Sinya." He kissed her. "I may be late tonight." And he went up the hole.

Taylinn huffed crossing her arms. "I thought he said he'd stay to look after Sinya."

"He's trying to find a way to get him home," her mother said.

"What are you doing home so early?" Karla asked, eyeing her children with suspicion. "You're not in trouble, are you?"

"Not at all," Avigale said. "Mr. Grey let us out a few minutes ahead of time."

"We were about to wash the cloaks and Sinya's clothes but since you're here, would you do them and Karla and I will start lunch?"

Taylinn frowned and was about to say something when her sister spoke. "Oh, okay." Avigale nodded taking the basket of clothes.

"And collect some berries and corn," Karla asked, handing Dotty her empty basket.

"Can Sinya come too?" Dotty asked.

"Do you want to?" Ellen asked.

Sinya nodded his head and stood.

"Don't badger him, Dotty," Karla called as the children climbed out of the hole.

Clouds blocked the warm ray of the sun as the children marched across the field. Taylinn complained about something while her sister told her to stop. Sinya walked behind, gazing in awe at the fern and green around him. There were no glass skyscrapers, no round houses, not a single structure in sight, unless you count the rock shelf hanging over the hole of the Sul's home.

Sinya followed the group of children across the plain. A few kids that were out playing went up and touched him before their parents would snatch them back. Leroy looked behind him and called, "You're almost like a myth around here. Humans are anyway. It's like seeing Alphine for real."

"What's Alphine?" Sinya asked.

“Mmmm,” Leroy thought, “It’s where we are told the Fay folk exist on.”

“Oh,” Sinya said, “We have myths like those. At school we’ve started learning about Avalon of King Author.”

“I like that movie,” Dotty said.

“How is it that you have the same shows and music interments as Earth?”

“I told you, our dad invented it,” Taylinn said.

“Where did he get the ideas from?” Sinya asked.

“A good inventor doesn’t need to see things to get good ideas,” Avigale snapped.

*He has to get it from somewhere.* Sinya decided not to say anything else. Dotty strolled beside staring at him with intense eyes. *Oh, great,* Sinya thought.

“So...” she paused, probably remembering what her mother had said, before continuing. “What does Earth look like? Is it green like this?”

“Here and there. But it’s nothing like this. My mom told me stories of how it used to be all green with grass and trees all over the place. I didn’t think I would get to see anything like this.”

“You said you live above ground? What is that like?”

“You feel the sun sometimes. It’s not always cold. You see the sky all the time.”

“That sounds strange,” Dotty said. “I don’t think I could do it. What do you...”

Sinya stopped at the darkened forest.

“What’s wrong?” Dotty asked as the other three turned and waited.

“It’s so dark,” he whispered. Crossing into the forest, Sinya peered around this way and that until he tripped on a root and the four children snickered. Dotty helped him up. The trees bunched overhead to form a tunnel while they continued along the dirt path. Dotty stayed by Sinya’s side while the four children all played hide and seek. Sinya tripped on the edge of the cloak again and Dotty saved him from tumbling to the ground.

“Stupid thing,” he muttered. He could feel the cloak loosen around his neck, but he didn’t trouble with it. They came to a clearing with a body of gray water. They walked up to the edge

and sat on the soft grass. Avigale dumped the basket of Sinya's clothes and cloaks into the river.

"What are you doing?" Sinya asked. A bar of lye soap emerged from the pile.

"How else am I going to get the clothes clean?" Avigale asked, taking the lye and scrubbing his jeans first.

Dotty headed back the way they came with her basket looking at bushes.

"You want to hear the tale of Sapphire Lake?" Taylinn asked Sinya.

"What's that?"

Taylinn spoke with a dark tone to her voice. "Mer-Dragons. Long ago, they were vicious serpents that chased Elousens and killed them."

Sinya looked towards the water.

"Legend says they've been driven away by something, no one knows for sure. But some say they just disappeared into the lake, waiting for their time to emerge again." Taylinn glanced toward the murky lake.

"Let's see if they're down there." Avigale stuck her hand in the lake and held it there for a few minutes until...her arm was pulled into the water. "Help! Help!" Avigale cried. Sinya grabbed her arm and pulled. Then Avigale's hand jumped out splashing water in his face. They all laughed.

*Pick on the new kid. Just like kids at school. Well, if this is a dream,* Sinya thought angrily. He walked up to Avigale but then he felt his feet come off the ground. "Help!" he cried. The kids just stood watching as he got high as the trees. Then Taylinn's tail wrapped around him and brought him back to the ground. Avigale threw the cloak around him and secured it around his neck. Sinya tried to catch his breath then socked her in the stomach. "Think that was funny? Just letting me float away and splashing water in my face." Then he struck Taylinn before she could react. Sinya then strolled toward the direction of Dotty and caught up with her. Her basket was half full of berries.

She looked at him. "They're not really mean. They just don't understand. That's all," she said, eating a berry, and offering him one. "They're not used to sharing, yet. Well, sharing with someone that's different." A berry hit Dotty.

“That was meant for the human,” Taylinn said.

“It took you long enough to save me,” Sinya said.

Sinya told Dotty what happened.

“We could have just let you float away,” Taylinn said.

“I take it back, Sinya.” Dotty scowled at her. “Maybe they are that mean?”

No one said anything for a minute. “So now what, are you in love already?” Taylinn asked strolling up to them.

Dotty stared at Taylinn for a minute.

“Sorry,” Taylinn said.

“I’m not the one you should be saying that to,” she said, strolling away.

Sinya saw Taylinn look at him, “sorry,” she said quickly and chased after Dotty. The wind picked up and leaves began to blow. *I wish they would hurry with my clothes*, he thought. Taylinn picked some berries and placed them into Dotty’s basket then went to pick some further ahead. She stopped abruptly.

Taylinn’s ears leaned forward and her tail froze in a curve.

Dotty called Taylinn’s name a couple of times but to no reply. All at once Taylinn turned around and dropped to all fours running toward the river.

Dotty and Sinya looked at each other and chased after her. Back at the river they found Avigale with folded cloaks in the basket and Sinya’s clothes on top.

“I think we should go now that we have the berries and the cloaks washed,” Taylinn said.

After Sinya got dressed behind some bushes, they walked the winding path toward the fields.

“What had you so spooked back there, Tay?” Dotty asked.

Taylinn swallowed. “It was nothing, Dot..” But Taylinn’s head swiveled into the distance.

Sinya also looked in the direction. *Could it be she heard Mer- Dragons...or is it something worse waiting for them?*

As they strolled along Sinya reflected on what happened when his cloak fell off. *Never heard of a planet with no gravity before*, he thought. “So, you don’t float away when you take your cloaks off on the surface?” he asked.

“No,” Leroy said. His gray tail traced the edges of the cloak.

“For us, it’s like your clothes, coverings for your body. But Earth

must be a little bigger than our planet, so you can't stay on the ground easily. I'd keep this cloak on if I were you."

*Good idea*, Sinya thought.

Coming upon the entrance to the home, Avigale stopped Sinya. "You know we were just joking, right? No need to tell mother about this."

*Being thirteen and the oldest, you should take responsibility.*

But he just nodded and climbed into the hole after everyone else did. "Oh, thank you kids," Ellen said. "Took you a little long, did anything happen?"

"My cloak came off and I began rising from the surface."

"How did your cloak come off?" Ellen asked.

"Avi—I—um, tripped," Sinya said. *Shoot!*

Ellen and Karla stopped going through the cloaks and eyed the kids. "What really happened?" Ellen asked. "We don't tell lies in this house."

Sinya swallowed. *Guess I better tell them. And he did.*

Taylinn and Avigale, broke in. "He hit us."

"Sinya, is this true?" Ellen asked, crossing her arms.

"Yes," he murmured out.

"All right, Avigale, Taylinn, upstairs," Ellen said, "We're going to have a talk."

But when they both chimed in that Sinya was at fault too she cut them off. "You want me to let Karla talk to you?" They went upstairs to Taylinn's room in a second. "I'll speak to Sinya about the rules later." She followed her girls. "Go easy on Sinya, Karla."

When Ellen closed the bedroom door, Sinya felt his stomach drop, remembering Karla's tail striking on her daughter. *Looks worse than what Stacia or mom would do.*

Karla's tail pointed at him like a finger. "It may be okay to hit where you come from but here we have laws that we abide by. And it's against the Fay Goddess to fight in physical contact. You understand?"

Sinya swallowed and tried to answer, but his tongue felt heavy, so he only nodded. When he saw Ellen come back with the girls, he relaxed a little.

"I think we better go home," Karla said. Her kids all whined but stopped at once when Karla's tail smacked the floor.

*I'm glad I'm not one of Karla's kids*, Sinya thought.

Dotty paused in front of Sinya while her family climbed to the surface. “Avi and Tay will get used to you. Oh, did you want to come to my aging ceremony in a few days?” Her mother called her through the hole. “Coming,” she said, twirling her tail with her fingers. “Is your mother as strict?”

“Stacia, my babysitter can be.”

Karla began counting and Dotty shot up to the surface.

“I think all three of you should get to bed early tonight,” Ellen said. “Taylinn and Avigale for pulling this prank, and you Sinya, for fighting. Did Karla explain?”

“Yes. There's no violence here.” *I don't get it*, he wanted to say, but he was afraid he'd get in more trouble. So, he followed Taylinn into her room. Avigale apologized again before returning to her own bedroom.

“You don't have to be such a tattler,” Taylinn said.

“Sorry, it just slipped out.”

Taylinn crawled into bed and sighed. “I'm sorry for pulling that prank.”

Sinya stared out the window where the sun light stopped, and the shadow traveled into the forest. *What had Taylinn so spooked?* he wondered. But when he turned to ask, Taylinn was already asleep leaving him to do nothing but the same.



