**Ch 8**

**The Mouth of Ganymede**

**Jupiter solar system, WASP 18-b, city state of PeoIoa**

**Cyano, Viatorem, 001, parallel 119TTB & 7SETT**

*“There are ocean’s vast, and deserts wide, but the truest way to find yourself, is through the ripple of years investigating your own nature. But if strictly trying to orientate yourself to place, then always be your own true north.”* ***Guidepost to Parallel Galaxies*, by Old Man, LaCrosta, OoT.**

Slowly, I started to feel my nerve endings again. Old Man had not mentioned that jumping parallels required atoms and molecules to separate. My head lifted from the water, and I saw a shore, rising before me. Visions of LaCrosta, my true home and the last place I remembered being, faded from my mind. The view before me was all but unrecognizable. My swimming became slower, more defined with each stroke instead of the speed defying race I had just endured to make this jump.

“Really? After all of it, to have emerged on this planet?!” The view of this new place was horrific. I shook my head to get the cogs moving inside. Did I even known what planet I had arrived on, this quickly? Nope! I glanced all around me.

I arrived at a beach of sorts. The sand in this new place, was black and shiny. The ‘water’ I was standing in, wasn’t water, but raging waves of lava and brimstone. I smelled sulfur, unsure if it was unpleasant or lovely. I lifted my head and gazed at the black shore. There was a creature with wisps of ethereal air for feet, and a domed head made of vapors on the beach. I looked for a place to come ashore that would avoid contact with the entity.

“Eessh, never been to fond of ghostI was curious about my own form. Was I a ghost too?

“Who are you, dearie? Get a sense of yourself!” I can still hear Old Man’s tone, making this instruction sound bawdy. I brushed my hand down my face, the memory of Old Man teasing me putting a smile on my newish vapor lips. I sought out the eyebrow, left then right, realizing they weren’t quite attached to brow. They felt like rumpled clouds, and a flash of dark grey stormed over my new eyes. Those had felt large, owl-like, without lids or lashes. I wondered about their color, but no mirror presented itself. My arms and legs felt weightless, my chest flat, no breast, where moments before there had been perky lumps. As I grabbed at ‘flesh’ on my arm, it oozed, like smoke, darting around the form of my fingers. My hips and legs felt much like the upper appendages. The genitals of a human body were non-existent on this new form. I felt a moments panic at the idea of no physical release. ‘How will I pee?’ I wondered. But I realized that perhaps this entity didn’t need to eliminate waste.

Despite the replacement of human flesh and bones, I felt, after only a few cursory touches, at home in this new being. Another talent gifted by the Council I suppose.

“Ah yes, the Council of Constellations; the magical beings of the sky, star dust and planets, gods for the making, always hiding little bits of them in me. Sneaky bastards.” I muttered to the vaporous fog all above me; it had strikes of lightning breaking through the mist, that seemed to crackle ‘Your welcome’ with each flash.

After my self-discovery, I felt energized. I looked to my wispy feet and compelled them to move me closer to the shore. I could just make out a darting movement below my legs. It must have been Relarq, a chauffeur of sorts; Old Man called him my chaperone. To me he was the Navigator, a constant during my paralysis jumps. I could not let myself be drawn below to his comfort and reassurance. Instead of focusing externally, I’d searched my mind for Old Man’s voice, scanning for the next grounding sentiment to continue assimilation into my new world.

“This one is a bit harder Via. We must find our when’s,” but he said Time Tally’s; OM used this word to signify the timeframes for each jump, think of it as his concept of a calendar. He measured days and years in wavelength lines flowing both vertical and horizontal; horizontal using East and West for guidepost, and vertical using future and past. So, the date in this Ganymede had been 119TTB, or one hundred and nineteen Time Tally’s Behind my DOB and 7SETT, or seven clicks east of my original Time Tally. Somehow, this knowledge made me feel older than my sixteen years.

The flash of maps and graphs blinked before me. I’d seen a certain galaxy clock; it was the result of OM dumbing things down for the LaCrosta version of Viatorem. The memory pulled me back to this new form.

“Christ assimilation is a beast!” I thought out loud.

“This next task should be easier, my sweet. Just look for the nearest sentient being and politely inquire where you might be in the universe?!” I rolled my eyes as I thought back to OM making this task sound easy.

“O hello there! I don’t know my name, but I sure could use a towel to dry off.” I looked down my form, expecting to see water dripping from me. Shit, right, there isn’t any water.

“Well the towel bit won’t play than,” I scold myself. And no water? How did I come to a planet with no water? My LaCrosta exit, hasty though it was, definitely had me swimming in cold water. I thought this was the only way to travel through the dimensions. Then, with a flash of insight, I felt certain that this was NOT true. Means of transportation between parallel’s was only limited by my own imagination. Another skill that would need honing.

“Of all the things that Old Man and PikraLida could have explained?? This is bullshit!” I, hopefully, would have a chance to yell this at them directly. Oh, how I longed to be back on the dock with Old Man and PikraLida right now. But I could feel their encouragement pushing me forward.

Attempting to familiarize myself, I turned a full rotation. The ‘sea’ became a drooping edged canyon, lined by black opaque boulders across the shoreline. They looked impenetrable. I thought the place smelled of hellfire. Waved flames of lava and spritzes of what looked like sparks, dashed against the boulders, sizzling as they lashed the crags. The heat caressed my skin like a vacant lover, burning and setting off tremors in me. A sudden quickening flickered, like a pilot light being lit. The air felt electric, and whatever nerve endings I had were alite. Fire was the bloodline coursing through my own being. This felt appropriate. I, Via, was a being born of fire and pressure, perhaps this new entity would not be such a stretch for me after all.

“I am of this place,” I chanted, “And…I have a ghost body. Classic.” I thought of my caretaker on LaCrosta, PikraLida. Her form was also ghostlike, maybe she was from this place? I would ask if I ever saw her again.

I was attempting to reassure myself that ghost bodies were totally normal, as I had drifted closer to that inferno island. There was much to uncover, and I’d been wearied at the prospect. Someone close by, was saying a name, and I realized I could be seen. This person was looking at me.

“Damnit!” I muttered, I shouldn’t have gotten so distracted, now I couldn’t avoid the beached being.

“Granuu! Hey get over here! Granuu!” I located the mouth and face calling my name, a ghosty appearing to bounce from side to side, obviously trying to get my attention. Realizing I couldn’t avoid this interaction, I turned fully toward the new being and floated over.

“Hi there” I started with something innocuous and simple. Clamping my teeth together, so I wouldn’t be my normal asshole self.

“First impressions are tantamount to survival, Via. Try to control your tone and temperament?!” Old Man had always insisted.

“Finally! This is unacceptable behavior from a royal, Granuu!” Their words sharp edged things. The being sucked in a breath, which pulled me closer to them.

“The Festival has already started, and we are due on stage for our binding ceremony very soon! How could you do this to me, Nu?” The being’s words had softened, looking, now, only disappointed, and worried. But their eyes leaked fire, a sure sign that they were not used to disobedience from their underlings. I had to strain hard against my natural rudeness, pointing out that I was no one’s underling, if only to myself! Old Man had told me often enough to stifle my instincts when meeting new creatures. Easy enough for him to demand!

“I apologize.” I said, attempting a smile. My friend laughed, with a shrillness that belied joy. But ‘friend’ didn’t seem correct, ah yes, that was because they were my betrothed! Layers of memory stacked on top of one another as I recognized that this was Junqui.

“Oh yeah? And what is it your sorry for, Nu? Leaving me last night after our fight and just disappearing? Or showing up hours before our ceremony looking...” and they pointed to my form, “terrible!” They’d been seething, smoke lifting from their head.

Junqui’s form flitted up and through me, disrupting my very anatomy, causing fire and gas to start a riot deep inside. I could feel their need for me to become the submissive person they had always known. Junqui pulled me into themselves. They patted the coif of ghostly nothingness that should be hair on head. I didn’t like being touched, but their weightless caress was tolerable. Ignoring the instinct to escape, I leaned into Junqui.

“Really, Junqui, I’m sorry. Time got away from me.” I said, attempting to be a good and demure Granuu, while also relaying a partial truth. Junqui pulled back, gazing into the flame of my eyes, searching, it seemed, for something they recognized. When they spoke, there was a hushed fear in their voice.

“I’m Junqui and I’ve asked for marriage of Granuu. And today, very soon, we are to be bound as one.” I felt flushed, what must that have looked like on a ghost form? With a start I had realized I could see myself in Junqui’s gaze, a gas white heat flaring up the sides of my cheeks. My eyes appeared vacant, though. I hadn’t quite matriculated, well, all of me at least, to this ghosty of Ganymede.

“This marriage will come with certain responsibilities that you cannot just avoid! And these disappearances of yours are unacceptable! I have spent the better part of this blink fighting with my family so that we could commence with the marriage.” Junqui half-heartedly yelled.

“And did it work?” I asked wistfully. Perhaps I wouldn’t have to go through with marrying a stranger after all. Junqui smiled coyly,

“Yes, of course!” But as the last syllable lashed from their mouth, I could see their pride at fighting hard for me. It seemed my new reality would be that of a married ghost. Perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad. I couldn’t say whether some internal mission or genuine care for this being compelled me to see where all of this would go. My eyes kept drifting to the metallic glint in Junqui’s ears.

So, I was to be a married ghost beached on a fire island. In the Jupiter solar system, dwelling firmly in the one and only WASP-18b. All the new old memories had washed over me, overwhelming every CO2 molecule of Granuu’s being. Or rather, what was MY being. I hoped I would start *feeling* inside myself sooner rather than later. I could hear Granuu’s whispering but filtered through my own voice. Afterall, in theory, Granuu and I ARE the same person. Apparently, dimensions, past, present, and future didn’t negate the commonalities of my own identity.

“Should I go get ready then?” I gulped at the gaseous air with large intakes of breath, stuffing my anger at this weirdness, down deep.

“Yes! Luria and Simon are waiting in the preparation area.” Junqui pointed further up the beach. Junqui reached out, and pulled my cheek, but not gently like a grandmother would. In normal circumstances, I’d have dodged a stranger’s touch. But Junqui was not a stranger, not really. I allowed their intrusion to be a touchstone, not something I lusted for, but a needed catalyst to this reality. They were squeezing tighter, bringing me mere inches from their face.

“I will punish you later for your insolence.” Junqui was smiling with an evil lust. Before I could stop myself, I roared out a laugh. Junqui reeled back, as if I had hit them.

“You’re not yourself today, Nu. But by the time I see you on that stage, you damn well better be!” Junqui said, then spun away and quickly floated down the beach. I looked for a place to hide from this awful being. But saw few spots that look like dwellings. I squinted and could just make out two new ghost emerging from a hole in the ground. Apparently, ghosts of PeoIoa dwell in sandy semi-underground caverns.

I didn’t like it, but I held myself still as the two new ghosts floated fast toward me. I would pretend to love this Junqui, devouring their need, helping to build a wall of emotional subterfuge around me. A grifters tool for survival. I was not here to love I was here to be my thiefy self. Granuu tickled the humor nerve in me,

“Well it couldn’t hurt to experiment with our bodies…for purely scientific purposes!” I said to us. Empirical evidence gathered, after all, would only make these jumps feel more like work, and not some labyrinth of my lost mind.

Suddenly, I heard a low humming and then a gust of presence brought me back to reality.

“Eeeeehhhhaaaa! Granuu has made it home! Granuu! You’re here and we thought you wouldn’t be back in time.” Medey? I’d known the face. I was their descendant; and they were a wealthy leader here in PeoIoa. Ramooney, Medey’s mate and my dearest parent, moved gently toward me, gathering us all in a breezy embrace. My gaseous heart pulsed quicker, o how I missed them! Really? Was this true emotion? The quickening in me suggested it was indeed. Before I landed on this planet, I had one mother and father, homo sapiens, a set-in stone family lineage. Now it seemed, my branches were extending, and birthing new trees. Could I love Granuu’s parental beings as much as my real family?

I wanted to ask where mother was, but that question seemed inappropriate. Why? Oh yes, PeoIoa was a First City of genderless entities, a world without pronouns. ‘What fun this will be.’ I thought.

“Of course, I would be back in time to marry my love!” I hoped this sounded believable to them. I saw their eyes dancing with happiness, but also a bit of apprehension. I must have disappeared at regular intervals for them to be so tentative with me. From my education with Old Man, I had thought, like an auto-pilot feature, my being had stayed intact and performed as normal, when the consciousness of, me, Via, jumped. Perhaps in this Ganymede it hadn’t been possible to leave behind this ghosty without sentience inside it. I must have jumped to this world many times if these departures were noticed by family. A small tug in the back of my mind, made me bookmark this moment for future study.

Medey pulled back, gazing deeply into my eyes. They turned away from our mutual warmth, and motioned for me to follow,

“I think it best I prepare you for the ceremony, my dear. Ramooney, will you let Luria and Simon know they aren’t needed just yet?” Medey and Ramooney exchanged a weighted look between them. Medey turned back to me,

“Ready?” they said. I hesitated for a moment, glancing around for a plausible excuse to go hide. Realizing this would only gain more attention, I floated after Medey. They led me to a sunken crater, the rim a seething wound, oozing hot blood-red ash. There were lilts like that of snapping flesh, making me jump nervously. But as we descended the slopes, the design of the place started to look more like a home, despite its lack of furniture typical for people with skin and bone.

“Sit here,” Medey motioned a space directly in front of an odd-looking mirror. The material of the mirror had not been glass, but I recognized it as the black boulders of PeoIoa’s shores. There was a wet sheen to the mirror rock. It reflected an essence of me, Granuu, sitting before Medey. But there was also a shimmering underneath Granuu, below the Umber toned gauze; it was a blue diamond face, glowing and vying for my attention. I hadn’t known where to look. I attempted to close my eyes, but ghost have no lids.

‘Duh, dumbass.’ I thought, managing a smile.

“Where were we?” Medey had jerked my wisps of hair, pulling me out of my digression. I imitated the movement of the tug.

“Damnit Medey! I’m here!” I reached up to rub the sore spot on my head, but the feeling hadn’t really merited the agitation I felt.

“EAHHHH! I can smell you. You must have bathed this morning in the froth?! Perfect for your beloved. Junqui has always been rather partial to that scent.” Medey laughed softly and began to hum as they ‘Colored’ me. You can’t dress a ghost! Instead Medey filled in the lines of my blank form, making a semblance of clothes with luscious colors of paint. The result presented me with the body of a cartoon character, only faintly hiding the ghost form under all the dripping acrylics. Medey layered my hair with a paintbrush, twisting it here and there to make intricate maze-like designs.

“Do I always keep my hair this long, Medey?” I asked, they looked at me knowingly.

“You aren’t quite caught up yet after this last vacation, eh?” They said, I nodded, lowering my eyes because I wanted to look contrite. Pretense, my new armor, hung heavily on me. Perhaps that’s why Old Man had warned that it wasn’t just the trudging in the water that would be the most difficult part of my travels. Medey was staring intensely at me. They nodded, seeming to decide something important.

“Would you like a story while I prepare you?!” Medey said rhetorically.

“You met Junqui LePlass at the Flattening Festival a long time ago. It would have been your ‘once upon a time’ story with them. The LePlass family has ruled here since the known inception of PeoIoa amongst the Ganymede sector, one of the many moons of Jupiter. I remember that initial meeting day well!” Medey smiled to themselves. Flashes of Granuu’s past drifted through my head as Medey spoke.

Junqui LaPlass had been on the reception stage with their royal entourage and family, the first time I saw them. Their eyes had been blazing orange. The thinness of their ethereal face had opened to a pattern of brightly colored threads that shone beneath their ghostly veils. Each of the royals, had their own unique shade of thread. Junqui’s was a brilliant gold.

The earlobes of Junqui and their lineage had also been unique. They had glowed silver, and when I was close to Junqui I had heard them murmuring. When I asked Junqui about them after several months of courtship, they responded,

“Our ancestors buried themselves in these electro-magnetic gauges, transmitting to us tropes from the past. They guide the Flattening Festival from the skies. Each a member of the elite Swan Song, or from natural dissipation into death.” They explained. Smoke screened pictures flashed before me. Suddenly, I saw the real meaning of these earlobe magics.

They, like our bigger moon of Ganymede, had truly been magnets. Jupiter has the most powerful magnetic pull of all the galaxy alum, and the gauged metal in the LePlass’s royal earlobes were directly connected to the planets core.

Junqui specifically had silvery looking gauges in their lobes. Ah, at last, my acceptance of marriage to Junqui, became quite clear. I’d been on Ganymede for the sole purpose of stealing these gauges! My hopes for a successful theft would be much easier when married to Junqui. The Council would have put a tracer in my base elements, not for self-awareness, no that I had to acquire; but for tracing the Numens of power across all dimensions. And like a gunshot, I’d been blasted into my true purpose. It made the alignment of Via and Granuu solidify.

I felt a shift in the room as Ramooney enters.

“Well well what a brilliant sight you are young one!” Ramooney said and floated forward.

“It’s time. Shall we?” Ramooney beckoned me, offering a drift of smoking hair to entangle my own mazed locks. Everything was fucking happening. Shit! Medey was behind me,

“You can do this Granuu. This is what you want.” Medey sounded so sure. I allowed their surety to propel me forward, now side to side with both my parents. I offered them a silent laugh. They smiled

We floated quickly and higher than I had yet done. It was thrilling. I could see why anytime anywhere me would come back to PeoIoa often. Maybe I didn’t get to float/fly as much in other parallels.

“Is that the Festival?” I stopped, bobbing up and down after an undetermined amount of time floating, my painted form dripping like sweat. There were thousands of ghosties below us. Their fire and smoke strands of replacement hair, aloft and connected to their neighbors.

“Well shit!” I was overwhelmed by what I saw on the beach of PeoIoa,

“This happens once a nod?” I asked. I’m sure my face showed the shock and awe I felt, but more so, my appendages were all pulsing gust of smoke; as it drifted out of me, a sound of water sizzled against the heated vapors, cooling it. My emotions stalled. This was all Granuu’s internal response to their physical stimuli. But I could feel something too, that resonated a tremor up my nerve stem, liken to a human body. The mind can conceive many idea’s at once, but nothing so toned and memoried as the nerves to human brain connection. Ramooney had flanked my sides, landing us at the back of the crowd still floating a bit above their intwined smoking hair. I tried to whisper to them,

“Aren’t we supposed to be on the stage?” But really, my eyes kept fast to the floating orb high above the ceremonial podium crowded with the LePlass royals. Even the brilliance of the podium decorated for my nuptials, could not draw attention away from the clear brilliant orb. I looked to Medey and quietly asked,

“What is it?” Medey turned, with a look of suprise on their face.

“The Dissipation Chamber. Where’s your mind today?” And Medey pushed their hand into the back of the airy skull, as if to shove Granuu’s memory into place.

I shifted my gaze forward to see the surroundings of this venue. The arena had been massive, with pinnacled gym bleachers, made of black stones, arranging the citizens in staggered heights. Finally, my eyes brought me to the stage, I glanced up, the clear Dissipation chamber almost palpitated. I saw a hole on the bottom, and another on top, directly over each other. Medey took me in and decided to guide my memory, saying,

“Beautiful is it not? But focus on your betrothed. We won’t be able to part this crowd, so we float above them. Fitting really.” Medey turned and winked at me. I shook my head, but my mouth lifted. There was a roar of ignited fire, as a large pulpit erupted a gust of volcanic molten lava, signaling the beginning of the festivities. It was the gun at the beginning of a race. An elderly ghost, with strips of the royal thread shining still through their aging form, stepped forward and began to speak.

“Today is a special day for the citizens of PeoIoa, city state of our beloved Ganymede. All hail! If oneness is all,” Junqui’s honored grandparent, Gusto LePlass boomed with a choiretic voice. The crowd chanted back,

“then none of the others need names.” A roaring so loud, busted my ears, and the heat ignited over the entirety of masses joined for the Festival. The waves of heat throbbed at us, closer and closer, putting all three of us in a state of neural bliss. Gusto LePlass, leaned back, lifting their foggy arms, making the crowds heads raise higher with their gesture. A hum began low, Gusto spoke stoically,

“Our great lineage, and the Swan Song chosen will guide us now. We will create a magnetosphere that is deeply embedded in Jupiter. The strong solar winds and magnetic plasma make-up of Jupiter cause a Bow Shock, once a nod,” A sonic wind resonated a picture of a storm and then an elongating of the planet along the equator, flashing all of us flat. But the Swan Song chosen were ready, drifting in between the LePlass royal family from below the stage; one by one the chosen lifted their heads and arms, and were blown up by the royals magnetic gauged earlobes, and into the awaiting vacuum of the orb. The first ghost met a firm wall of air in the middle of the orb and was laid parallel the floor; a ripping seared from the floating form. A human body appeared nearest the hole on the bottom of the orb; the form looking like a vestige of a human woman. Above the chosen’s parallel form, exposed dissipating tendrils of smoke and flame, fanning upward alarmingly fast. The grand view for the crowd, Ramooney, Medey, and I was a splendor of color, heat, and power. The spirits of the chosen continued to be stripped of past form, and future dissipation. Some were human forms, many more something else unknowable for now. ‘There is much to learn from even these short minutes of soul leaving past body,’ my curious traveler mind mused.

A light ignited, and the world arounds us flattened. And then the beaming of light from the lobes of the LePlass family, 17 in all, sucked us with backward, into the core of Jupiter. Creating a suction for the other orbiters of Jupiter; our family of Moons outside us doing the same. Their nods and ours aligning, despite the unfathomable distance between us. A voice pulled me back inside the core. Granuu and I, gazing forward, were struck with a sense of serenity as the four largest moons of Jupiter rested in the space between the magnetosphere and solar winds.

“When this Flattening happens, we Moons are not affected. In fact, we hold the planet together as it flexes its interstellar muscles.” Medey explained, but by then I had found some memories of past Flattening Festivals.

“The magnets in Ganymede and its three other Galliean moon counterparts are protection against the blast of the Bow Shock. And the LePlass royals are the beings capable of holding these moments out of space and time with their familial powers. They provide the resonance that protects us from the solar winds and create an arc that prevent the Bow Shock from breaking Jupiter.” Medey was leaving out the Swan Song chosen, but I could tell they wanted me to ask about them.

“And what of the Swan Song Chosen?” I asked with the necessary ignorance. Medey had looked down at my youthful face and smiled.

“The Chosen offer their own dissipation, so that their spirit may assist in the protection of Jupiter and our moons. The Chosen send their essence out into the points along the border of our galaxy to push back against the force of the Bow Shock. Rest assured that our festival is a time-honored tradition, celebrating the strength of our moon and the prestige we hold during the Bow Shock.” Medey stopped and shared a glance with Ramooney. Ramooney picked up where Medey stopped.

“You will be a provenance and gem to the LePlass line. You are a new generation of renewal, Granuu, and I’m so proud of you and your choice of marrying into the responsibility of the LePlass royals. But I come with a warning for you.” Medey had wrapped their weightlessness around me.

“While the LePlass family is a proud keeper of our people, there are some amongst the population that do not agree with how the LePlass have governed. The intermediate Swan Song of the hundreds of PeoIoaian’s that take place each year in reverence to the Goddess Jupiter, is a tradition better left in the past.” I could see some in the crowd openly weeping as Medey explained.

“But because of stubbornness and tribalism, the LePlass have been too afraid to change the rhetoric of the Swan Song, leaving it to overshadow the joy of living here on PeoIoa.” Medey swallowed hard after they spoke. I turned slightly so I was facing both my parents.

“But aren’t the volunteers for the Swan Song reverent of their own sacrifice? We honor them above any other tribes on PeoIoa for their great immolations!” I asked, with waxing clarity. Medey had stroked the underside of my wrist, attempting to soothe me.

“They are proud people, the Swan Song Chosen. But it is a tradition that no longer holds the reality of purpose it once did.” Medey nodded up past the orb, and I could see the dissipating spirits of the PeoIoaian’s drifting without purpose. Becoming a part of the aether, not some great wall of opposition against the Bow Shock.

“We sacrifice at Swan Song to keep the delicate balance of Ganymede’s synodic period. But Ganymede’s own evolution over the eons has balanced of its own accord, and our sacrifice is now only ornamental.” Ramooney had taken up the explanation, I was looking rather skeptically at the stage and the spectacle of death happening before us.

“If we were among the chosen for Swan Song sacrifice, would you not question the will of the LePlass at facing your inevitable dissipation?” Medey stopped short, waiting for my answer.

“I can’t deny that death of a few for the many, has ever made sense to me.” I mused. “It seems that the obstacles of everyday life, bend us low enough, and make us sacrifice so much, so quickly. And now, atoning with death to appease a tradition…born out of fear and not reality? Well, that seems rather ridiculous.” I used my authentic views to help bring harmony to the space between my parents and me. Medey concurred,

“You could offer our people a truer freedom to live. A more harmonious union right here in PeoIoa. Our small spark could send a light to the other Jupiter moons who also forfeit their inhabitants to ‘a greater purpose’.” Ramooney smiled sadly at Medey’s thought, glancing toward the crowd below, and then resting on the stage of royals.

“I fear that you neglect the nature of lore, and how it weaves into the fabric of our societies. We wouldn’t be dealing with rational logic. We would be standing against a wall of dissipated ancestors, ready to drown us for such heresy.” Ramooney looked at us and continued,

“There are some here that will say that sacrifice is never about just the concept. Rather, demanding our actual life force. What greater offering can we give than our very essence? Without these burdens, some in our society would feel purposeless and adrift.” Ramooney said, playing devil’s advocate. I could handle no more of this conversation. Every ounce of me was overwhelmed with chance and purpose.

“I feel ill equipped for this responsibility. I know so little,” my voice rising in panic,

“and what I do know, are fragmented thoughts, driven into me by a host of unregistered voices.” I almost shouted, tears sizzling down my cheeks. Medey and Ramooney clasped one another, frightened, perhaps, by who I was at my core.

“We are here for you, Granuu. We can help you forge a path of change in PeoIoa. But ultimately, this must be your choice alone to make. You will be in a unique position when married to Junqui. You will have the ear of all the royals; they alone can eradicate our archaic rituals.” Ramooney said. I choked back tears.

“You have no idea how right you are about that Mooney.” I drifted up, wanting some distance between us while I processed my family’s request.

“They *will* listen. We Cyano’s have a way of being heard like no other being. We are here to challenge the accepted wisdoms, sweet Granuu. Your meeting of Junqui LePlass was not a coincidence. It was an arrived at decision Medey and I came too after long decades of consideration. We offer you to the LePlass royals, with the hope that you can bring about change. You will…” Ramooney must have seen the blatant fear on my face because they stopped speaking.

What had this new information meant for Junqui and I? Would I accept the crusade for eradication of Swan Song? Or stick to the plan, steal the magnetic numen, and leave this world? O that I could!

Would I follow these parents that loved me, or my innate inner purpose as a Cyano time travelling being? Through the years of memories, I had seen Ramooney and Medey guiding me for their internalized purpose. I had felt anger at their interference. Ramooney took my angry look for worry over the Swan Song chosen.

“Look to your love, Granuu. They are strong leaders, with a thoughtfulness that past LePlass royals did not possess. There is a chance of success, between your passionate discourse for our people, and the facts of our traditions.” Ramooney crooned.

“One thing though,” my parents had exchanged a look again, Medey continued,

“We know that you cannot predict your own ‘departures’ but we are worried that if you keep disappearing, Junqui will become disheartened and end their relationship with you.” Ramooney turned me gently, looking me eye to eye, the glint of a glass jar appeared in Medey’s hand.

“We have a way to fix you to this place permanently. But it will be a great burden for you because your nature is to travel and explore the galaxies. We have known this about you from birth. But we ask you now, for the betterment of all here in PeoIoa, please, let us help you anchor to this time and world. It is the only way to assure asylum from Swan Song and mend the gap between the people and PeoIoa’s rulers.”

I hadn’t known how to respond. I had felt the need from them mate with the heat of us, mingling the air and creating the scent of civil unrest. My parents had known I could travel to different parallels, though they themselves could not? How did they propose to stop these jumps? The thought of being stuck here forever made my fire veins go cold. I had tried not to cringe away from Medey and Ramooney.

“Does it have to be this very moment? Can I not enjoy the binding ceremony to Junqui without the weight of this decision?” I said angrily, and motioned toward the stage, where in a few moments, and I would float to Junqui and bind myself to them. Medey had lowered their head to their chest, causing my words to feel flat and self-centered.

“It should be today, Granuu.” Ramooney had spoken softly and taken my hand. I had felt the buzz of time around my head, the pressure of potential heroism laid heavy in my thoughts. This had been the first jump I remembered, and already I was being pushed to decide something I didn’t fully understand. This would become a tenant of almost every jump for the first hundred or so.

I had wondered, ‘Should I trust these parents of PeoIoa?’ I knew them in distance glances of memory, from shores I’ve long since swum through, but in my newly arrived mind set, they were practically strangers. Nevertheless, strangers that filled me with a bubbling emotion of love and loyalty.

What would Old Man advise me to do? I heard a gentleness inside me. The book Old Man and Ms. PikraLìda embedded in my arm had tingled. I needed to sneak away and consult the words written inside the pages. There didn’t seem to be time though, Gusto LePlass was motioning the three of us toward the stage. Gusto was saying the words of binding, as we floated toward the royals and Granuu’s destiny. We arrived and I floated to Junqui’s side, my head by their ear. I gazed at their gauges, silvery bright, whispering words to only me. Gusto was making the pronouncements of love, but a noise began tearing through the crowd. It sounded like a rusty anchor being dragged along a concrete floor. All the citizen’s and royals looked about for the source of the noise. But I could almost feel it, and without thinking, turned toward the fire lake behind the Flattening Festival grounds. There was a blacked out shape the size of the orb, hanging inches above the waves of magma. All eyes eventually found the spot that the noise came from, my chance for a quick extraction was now or never. I leaned toward Junqui, cupping my whispy palms around their ear.

“Would that this was all over and you and I alone together.” I caressed their neck and licked at their cheek, as I whispered my provocative words. Junqui turned a bit and offered a smile but was too distracted by the black hole above the lake to reciprocate.

All at once, I found myself lifted high, and a pull of tide, surged me back toward the shoreline, only feet from the newly developed blackness. A cold surge flooded my being, a raised awareness of pending doom bolted me to the spot. Emerging from the hole was a black and white form. The chalked outline could not hide the species or sex of this formidable being. I could hear Ramooney and Medey screaming my name.

*A human man appeared suddenly, hooded, with a fuzziness that precluded recognition. He had looked like a chalk outline drawn over his real person but colored in haze. He had walked three sandy steps, landing at last within touching distance. He was staring deeply, despite being able to see through me.  He had something that resembled a gun in his hand. It had looked familiar and old, but all was blurred as in a dream.  I felt out of body, peering into a portrait of myself looking at a man with a gun.  Only the 3-orange flecks in his right eye were stark and clear to focus.  He raised his arm, and swiftly, gently motioned with the gun, as if saying,*

*'Left three paces.’ His gun was slanted slightly down toward my brow, as he was taller than Granuu.  I moved the three paces without having meant to slide left, Granuu’s obedience, betraying us.  The man had then shot me between the eyes.  It had been a perfect shot, and I had perfectly died.*

Ramooney and Medey flung themselves from the stage, chasing after Granuu, but with every flit forward a wave of heat and hate pushed them back. Medey bolted up toward the sky, then dropped behind Granuu, slightly off centered. The form motioned for Granuu to shift left, directly in the line of vision for Medey to watch the whole terrible ordeal. As the gun lifted, a boom of shadow and metal slammed into Granuu, and like an exorcism, the form of Via was ripped out of Granuu. Via’s form shot up and then dove into the magma lake. Granuu’s essence, emptied and began to puddle. Medey burst forward, pushing against the force trying to shorten the distance between them and Granuu. Medey sunk to their knees, getting as close as they could, and collected a tuft of smoke from Granuu’s dying hair, forcing it into the tiny jar in their hand. Medey’s head fell, opening their mouth and releasing a roar that ripped open their fogged chest. Ramooney finally reached Medey, and together, they screeched into the ether.

The black hole sucked the form back inside itself and disappeared from the face of PeoIoa. An instant in a life of just so moments, Medey could only sob and Ramooney only cradle their partner, as the weight of fate and phantoms galloped on into the thrust of spinning galaxies and time.