

Family

By Michele Dutcher

“I was dreaming that I leading a small child across a field of flowers,” said the 60-something woman, reclining on the invisible couch.

“Have you seen this child before? Do you know her?”

“No, no. The child had long, spider legs – like a tweak.”

“I understand,” said the psychiatrist, leaning forward a little to listen better. “Go on.”

“This child and I were walking somewhere to buy a dress for some kind of festival.” The woman looked over at the doctor, barely moving her head.

“There’s no reason to go any further, Mrs. Simians. You’re probably having a reaction to the implantation. Sometimes the intestinal parasite is close enough to the spinal column to pass over memories from its previous owner. It’s not common, but it’s not unheard of either.”

“Thank you doctor,” said the woman looking tired. “Can I go now. I’d like to go home.”

“Just let me wave your son in. He’s been eager to see you.”

A young man in strikingly good health stuck his head through the wall and the wall became transparent. “Is she okay, doctor? She seemed so upset.”

The man in the white coat smiled gently. “She’ll be fine. Sometimes it takes a while for the host and the symbiont to balance each other. Right now the parasite may be having trouble within its new environment. Sometimes the solution is as easy as feeding it foods it’s familiar with.”

The mother snarled at her son as he approached her. “I never wanted that thing inside me.”

“You’ll live longer with it – and be in better health as well.”

“The doctor sat down on a metal stool between them. “Intestinal parasites evolved step by step with humans. We believed that the spotlessness of space would keep us healthy, but orbitals like the Mystic may be a bit too clean. The reintroduction of a symbiotic parasite that has been harvested from a tweak may keep you strong for another sixty years.” The doctor crossed his arms as though certain he had made his point.

“It’s that part, the harvesting that...” The pain was instantaneous, as the woman grabbed her mid-section before buckling over. As she began to pass-out she could hear her son lunge towards her, screaming for assistance.

Merna was dreaming again. She had seen the greenhouses of Sedna in holos, but she was inside of them now. As she looked straight up, she could see a brilliant star called Sol, surrounded by colored, crescent lights. Her true home was there, circling a red crescent.

She looked down and her arms and legs were spider-like as they went about their daily work, tending to the fields of vegetation. She was male. In the near-distance another spider-like creature looked at her and smiled. She could feel the contentment of the symbiont inside her. A musical phrase sounded and all the tweaks in the field began to move forward, heading toward the feeding rooms where they would eat a midday meal. Taking the hand of the female, Merna noticed the tweak was pregnant.

“Mom, can you wake up? Can you hear me?”

“We need to get her into surgery Christopher. The symbiont is rejecting her – she’ll die if we don’t get it out of her now.”

“Mom, I’ll see you after the surgery.”

Within the offices of Applesoft, two middle-management employees were getting ready to go home.

“We received another report of a symbiont rejecting its host. This time on Mars.”

“That’s the third one this month. What the heck happened this time?”

“Same thing – the symbiont would rather have stayed inside the tweak it was harvested from.”

The aging employee pushed his fingers through his hair in frustration. “But the tweaks are just the Bio-engineered property we grow the symbionts in. Genetically engineered things that we sustain until the parasites are viable for harvest.”

Earl looked at Charley while turning off his console. “I think it’s the fact that these creatures have families on Sedna – mates and children they care about. The symbionts pick up on that – and rebel against killing the hosts and being transplanted.”

“Excellent! Let’s make it policy that the offspring are immediately and permanently separated from their parents after they’re dropped. The tweaks will have no illusion that they are anything more than Applesoft property. Problem Solved. We could even feed them less, so the symbionts will be happier in their new hosts.”

“Seems a little heartless, to me,” mumbled Earl.

“We’ll both get a promotion for figuring this one out, my friend,” shouted Charley, slapping Earl on the back in triumph.

The End