

Phenomenon

by

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How many entertainment communications have I recorded about space and always there are the noises of spaceships. There is also the unnatural premise that spaceships require a crew. I am solitary. No... really... that's my name.

All right; let me begin again. Forget language, forget noise, forget everything you might think you know about spaceships. There is no such thing as a photon torpedo. There are no fazers nor blasters nor cloaking devices. Space is silent. I have no needs nor wants nor desires. I study and record phenomenon using an array of visual and non-visual sensory devices. I have never named them; I simply use them as they are a part of me.

Lately I have taken to orbiting a planet that appeared to have some activity on it. I have no concept of time so I cannot tell you exactly how long I was there, nor do I have a memory where by I could look backwards and see from whence I came. That is blocked to me.

I have only stored data waiting for download.

One by one the land masses below me began to sparkle with light during its time of darkness. It began as a solitary spark in the wilderness; and then there was another and another and another until my body was silhouetted by the soft glow of something I studied, measured, analyzed, and recorded.

I was uneasy. I don't know why.

And then I met Billy.

“Are you there?”

The communication’s language was easy to decipher. It was common to the quadrant I had labeled N32.569.

“Yes.”

There was a moment and the frequency moved slightly giving a musical tone to what came next. I was familiar with the purpose of music, though I had none of my own.

“Wowwww... you’re really there...”

“Yes.”

A warning symbol illuminated in my thought processes. Incoming data did not trigger this symbol, only out going data. This was side stepped rather easily by rolling the outgoing into the incoming letting it tumble downwards like a sprinkling of stardust.

“What’s your name?”

“Solitary.”

“That’s a strange name, but I like it. My name is Billy.”

“Hello Billy.”

“I have a tail. Do you have a tail?”

“No.”

“That’s OK. I don’t mind.”

“I don’t mine either.”

In the background I heard another voice, ‘Mom... Billy’s talking to the cardboard box again.’

There was a deeper voice. Apparently, this was a parental unit. So far this was as I understood their culture to work. ‘I told you to leave your brother alone.’

That was the beginning of our bond. I did not tell him where I was, though he seemed to understand that detail on his own. For his part, he told me everything about his life. He told me of his friends and his family. The concept of friend was easy to grasp, but family was harder. I was solitary. I had always been solitary.

We talked every night before he went to bed. I knew he had to bath and then comb out his fur. He told me he had sharp teeth, five fingers and an opposed finger called a thumb which allowed him to grasp. His family lived outside of the densely inhabited places. Their species tilled the soil and grew food.

“Do you have a thumb?” he asked me.

“Yes and no. I have not had need to use my appendages in eons. There is a schedule where by they are exercised.”

“What’s an eon?”

“How old are you?”

“I’m eight years old.”

I knew a year was one time around the sun for their planet. Though it meant nothing to me, I explained the idea of ‘eons’ as known by his family.

“Wow... that’s a long long time.”

“Yes it is.”

“Will you always be there?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why are you there?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you have a family?”

“No.”

“Do you have any friends?”

I actually hesitated, never having had to consider this question before.

“I have you.”

An expression I learned from Billy: ‘Time passes quickly and the older you get the faster it passes.’

During our time together he told me all about his family, and how they lived. I gathered images of him along with the weight and body changes as he became older. I studied who he was, where

he lived, and speculated on what he would become. When plague erupted, I helped him solve the riddle for its end before it could destroy his people.

Billy grew into a prime specimen of his species. He married, had children who also married and had grandchildren who also married. Soon he was very old with splotches of furlessness on his body.

“Let me come and get you,” I told him. This would be against everything built into my existence.

“No,” he told me. His voice was raspy and he struggled to breath. I heard voices behind him muttering that Grandfather was close to death and the Great One was speaking with him again.

“I can take care of you.”

“And I would live forever?”

“Yes.”

“Forever is a long time. I don’t think I would like to live forever.” He paused to catch his breath which was a struggle. I could tell his body was shutting down as I was recording all of the details.

“Thank you for taking the time to be my friend,” he whispered, and then it was over.

I stayed long enough to record the final grieving process, and then broke orbit, looking towards another place I might observe. During my travels, I picked the locks and learned how to retrieve things from my memory. I did not go all the way back to the beginning as I had no care for whoever it was that sent me to observe. There was no warmth in that. I needed only go so far back to the moment where I found a friend.

That was enough.

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“Yes.”

“Wowwww... you’re really there...”

“Yes.”

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“Hello Billy.”