

*I was lazily making my way through space when I spotted this pretty little solar system. Planets of varying sizes and hues, some with fantastic rings. I love flying through rings so I can look behind me and see how long it takes for the ring to close back up. Sometimes they don't, and it's as if I've left my mark on the universe. Too bad I can't put my name on it, but other races that also navigate through the universe probably wouldn't ever stop to read it.*

*As for the one race that would notice, I didn't want them to know I had been around. Once the Zarlens start on your trail, they don't stop until they make the kill.*

*So, I settle for leaving only a mark whenever I can. You know; a trench here, a quick little planetary rock or dust sculpture planted there, or flying close to a planet and trailing my way through the atmosphere to create a swirl.*

*And there, the third planet out from the sun was a gorgeous little blue and green garden planet with white clouds. I couldn't resist – I had to fly closer.*

*Just like my home, this planet has a clear atmosphere. I wanted to smell this world's fragrance, so I flew in closer than I normally would.*

*It was intoxicating! There were eddies and swirls and rivers of movement in the air. I dived and glided and soared. I flew over a large area of water and saw it wasn't just blue – it was different shades of blue and green, with foamy white stuff on the tips. I trailed my fingers in the cool liquid. A smell rose from the water, not necessarily pleasant, but curiously not unpleasant either.*

*Then I saw movement beneath the surface and burst with joy. Small things, big things, some with pretty colors and some drab. This planet had life!*

*I continued flying closer to a small green island. Creatures were flying about, diving into the water, and soaring back out. The island was surrounded alternately by beautiful beaches of*

*white sand, and soaring gray and brown walls of rock. The water was the most beautiful clear blue I had ever seen.*

“General Blather, the pilots report they have the Unidentified Object on their radar. It's showing up as an opaque cloud-like object. There has been no response to any verbal commands.”

“Tell them to close in. Let me know as soon as they make a visual identification.”

*On the horizon, some very large, curious-looking flying creatures were quickly coming my way. These didn't move their wings and clouds trailed behind them.*

“General, the pilots are reporting that upon visual inspection it appears to be a bright diaphanous cloud about the size of a Cessna. It seems to be moving under its own volition.”

“Have them continue to move in and try to raise communications with the object.”

*They didn't act like the other flying creatures; they kept on a straight course – toward me. It occurred to me that not everything on this planet might be friendly. I rose to see what they could be.*

“General, the pilots report the Unidentified Object is quickly moving up and away.”

“Has it responded to any verbal commands?”

“No, Sir.”

“Are they sure it's moving under its own power?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Give the command to fire at will.”

*Several small creatures detached from the larger ones and flew even faster toward me. I continued to rise up and out of their way.*

*They followed me.*

*I HURT! I'm surrounded by bright light and booming sounds. My body is being torn apart. I'm on fire. I try to hold onto myself, but I can feel every molecule of my body flying away.*

*I don't have time to send a distress call home. I won't survive long enough for anyone to get here and heal me.*

*There is one possibility. I have overheard the elders discussing our people's oldest stories and how sometimes our ancient ones were able to condense their essence into a tiny compact globule of energy. However, even the elders do not know how it was done. But I have nothing to lose, and my life to keep if I can do this.*

*I focus on everything inside of me . . . my soul, my consciousness, memories, wants and desires, family, and friends, and most of all, my will to live. I am not going to just evaporate away. I am going to live, and I will give up my body to do so.*

*Suddenly, my mind and soul are painfully wrenched from my body. I scream. But I have nothing to scream with. My body is dead.*

*I float away. Aware of everything around me, I feel so light. I do not possess much energy or self-direction so I use the explosive winds to whip me away from the final destruction of my body. Then a gentler flow of air moves me toward the small island.*

*Eventually, the wind dies down and I land upon the cool blue water close to the island. The water bobbles me up and down. Soon it is pushing me higher and higher onto the land. I use a little of my energy to roll myself up and away from the water.*

*I need rest. After that, I can explore this different form I have become. But I don't fall asleep as I would have before. Instead, I find my awareness expanding, flowing in and around everything near me, almost as if I am merging with my surroundings. I am not awake or asleep.*

*The song of this island caresses and flows, soothing me.*

Seven-year-old Johnny wandered down to the beach, kicking everything in sight. His parents were too busy with his little sister to pay much attention to him. But that's not what upset him. His five-year-old sister, Lilly, is sick and he knows she isn't going to last much longer. It sends shivers down his back every time he sees her struggling to breathe.

Once he reached the beach, he sat on the sand just above the high tide line. Lost in his tears, at first he didn't notice the pearl-like thing the receding waves had left behind. But he did notice when it didn't stop rolling up the beach. It didn't move quickly, just a slow gentle roll, and then it stopped two feet to his left.

At first, he just watched it. It was the largest pearl he'd ever seen, about the same size as a jawbreaker, and it pulsed with a creamy glow. Then he felt, rather than heard, a gentle sigh of relief. He could only describe it as if the softest of winds had swirled around him.

As only a small child could readily know, he knew this was no pearl. It was magic. But not the kind of magic that made you laugh out loud in surprise. No, this was like the wonder created by turning on the Christmas tree lights for the first time – all you can do is quietly say, “Ooh!”

He knew something else too, Lilly needed to see this before it was too late. Slowly, he approached the pearl and gently slid his hand under it. He held it loosely cradled between both hands next to his belly, afraid it might disappear if he gripped it too tightly. Johnny walked carefully up the path to the house, feeling as if he was holding a sleeping fairy in his hands.

Hesitating at the back door, he listened for his parents. He heard them in the kitchen with his fifteen-year-old sister, Rosemary. Quickly he slipped down the hallway to Lilly's bedroom

while they weren't looking. Quietly, he pushed the door open.

Lilly was asleep, but only because she was so exhausted she couldn't stay awake. Her skin had the sheen of fever. Her long dark brown hair clung wetly to her head and her eyes were surrounded by dark shadows. The wheezing was horrible to hear as her lungs labored to breathe.

Johnny knew not to wake her. He gently set the pearl in the tissue box next to her bed, then quickly walked back out of the room.

Lilly dreamed. Slowly the nightmares where she's suffocating are replaced by visions of the deepest dark. Balls of light fly by. Then they begin to move closer and grow into stars and planets. She knows what planets are because she loves watching the Star Gazers show on PBS about the stars in the night sky. She glides past all the planets. She wants to stop and look at them, but she can't. Something is pulling her onward.

She circles a planet wreathed in puffy clouds. There is only one large continent. It looks like a fat horseshoe and takes up about a third of the planet's surface. The rest of the planet is water. The ocean is the most beautiful shade of turquoise she's ever seen.

Suddenly she's choking again. She's flung far away from the pretty planet and back into blackness. Lilly knows she's dying even though she doesn't understand what that means. It just hurts, a lot.

*I am jolted back to awareness by gasps of distress coming from a creature lying near me. I send out a tendril of thought to see if I can communicate with it. It is not awake and I discover it's easy to probe its mind. This is not a mature member of its species. It is female. And she is dying. I probe further and find that a portion of her brain is not heavily used.*

*I begin to think I might be able to insinuate myself into an unused corner. A quick perusal of her condition tells me that her body, specifically her lungs, is being attacked by microscopic organisms preventing it from working properly.*

*I quickly decide on a plan. If I wish to inhabit this creature I must remove the organisms so she and I can both live. It takes a good portion of my energy to direct her body heat to pinpoint and burn up the organisms and heal her illness.*

*While I can easily manipulate her thoughts and body functions, her mind keeps rejecting the invasion of my consciousness. Her kind must not be used to sharing their thoughts.*

*I search her memories, looking for the ones that bring her happiness, trying to find something that will reassure her and lower the blockage in her mind enough to allow me a small corner to reside within.*

*There – she loves all things her kind considers magical or mystical. She is especially enraptured with creatures known as angels, fairies, and mermaids. Perhaps, if I can create the right scenario, her mind will relax. This will not be easy. It will take almost all of what little energy I have left. But once I have decided upon a course of action it has never been easy to dissuade me. I begin to create a mystical experience to enthrall the young creature.*

Lilly awakens without any drowsiness. Her bedroom is different. The whole room is softly glowing. The floor appears to be covered by globes that are giving off a foggy soft light. Not only that, she is clothed in a beautiful white gown that is also softly glowing. She thinks she sees gems and pearls adorning the gown, but the glow hides the details in a shimmery haze. Her doll that always lays by her side wears a matching gown.

She realizes she is breathing without any struggle. Sitting up, she wonders if this

beautiful dream will disappear with movement. It doesn't. She pushes aside the comforter, hugs her doll close to her chest, and swings her feet over the side of the bed. Holding her breath, she slides off the bed onto the floor.

Feeling the floor under her feet, she realizes she isn't dreaming – this is real! There's no fear, only peace, and she begins to wonder if this is heaven. She holds up the hem of her gown and slowly steps between the glowing globes, afraid of squishing them if she's not careful.

There is a presence here. But she's not scared. She's drawn to it. It's as big as a grown-up. But she can only see an outline of the being, its features are hidden in the glowing haze. In her heart, she believes it's an angel. It reaches down to her as she lifts her arms. There's a smile on her face and she feels a happiness she has never experienced before in her five years. The angel enfolds and comforts her. Lilly never wants it to leave her.

*This scenario was the perfect one to use. The little creature is so trusting and ready to accept new experiences. She welcomes my presence without a fight. But I fear she might begin resisting again before I can completely integrate into her mind, so I take over and put her into a restful sleep.*

*I walk us back to the bed and climb up into it. I make sure to cover us up. She needs time and rest to regain her strength. When she awakens she will only remember having a wonderful dream.*

*For the first time since the death of my body, I feel safe. I find myself looking forward to the experiences I will share with this Lilly while I wait for help to arrive.*

*Just before I fall asleep I wonder if I will be able to contact my home while in this body. If I can send my thoughts to my people, will they be able to understand me while I am inhabiting*

*this creature?*

*I always worry about the possible consequences too late.*