

The Lost Grey—A Tale of Interspecies Redemption

by [Andy Thomas](#) (October 2024)



Stargazer (Matthew Wong, 2019)

Part One

Kelsey

The sound of beating helicopter rotors stirred Dr. Adrien Kelsey from his ruminations. A search light illuminated the land around his remote cottage and shone briefly into his living room.

He swore to himself, brushing the cigarette ash from his lap.

His two dogs, which had been sleeping quietly beside him, sprang into life. Bobby, a black mongrel-collie, bounded onto the sofa to get a better view out of the window. His bark made him sound larger than he was. Maggie, a much older female, lifted her head from the carpet and let out a long growl punctuated by little barks.

Kelsey managed to stand and move unsteadily toward the window next to Bobby. They peered out together, but helicopter was already moving off, its search light sweeping out arcs across the moorland.

Dr. Adrien Kelsey, one time Associate Professor in Astrophysics, sank back into his chair and reached for the bottle. He emptied the contents into his glass and returned to where he had left off... how the wheels had come off his former life.

Academia was a world he no longer recognised. It was a world which no longer wanted him either.

In the final years, the idea of remoteness had seemed so enticing. Somewhere far away, he recalled with dark amusement, from useless meetings, bureaucracy, and the ideologies of people. A distant asteroid for which the sun would be no more than a bright star. An icy world of glorious solitude far removed from all that was the madness of the inner solar system.

That's where he had wanted to be. It had been the thing he had sought.

The west coast of Scotland was where he had existed for the past three years or so. It had seemed like the next best thing, but a little more realistic.

There were big plans, of course. There were a few books he was going to write, research he was going to continue in some remote capacity and various rustic projects. But all that had fallen away or amounted to nothing. He had drifted into a way of being for which time held no meaning. It was one in which days could pass without distinction between light and dark.

His dogs stared intently at him, their chins resting on the carpet.

They had got Maggie as a pup when his children were young. That was fifteen years ago now. He had always been the one to look after her, he remembered. His mind drifted back to the divorce, bitter rows and the false allegations made in court. His children had, he belatedly realised, grown up despising him while he had been oblivious.

He had discovered Bobby sleeping in the shed when he had moved into the property. He was a stray who had run away from travellers in the area at the time.

First Night

The cigarette burned in the ashtray, dropping its unsmoked ash, as Kelsey drifted into unconsciousness.

Hours passed.

How many, he could not be sure, when he stirred once more into a dream in which he was awake. He was aware of a presence before him while being pinned in his chair. He fought to move,

but could not.

He heard a moan from somewhere—a long low moan gave out, not by him, but by his body.

Fear coursed through every fibre of his being, every atom, every synapse. His whole body screamed, entombed in a state of paralysis. His eyelids seemed weighted, and he realised he was seeing without them. Cortical vision. This was a strange kind of awareness. This was a terrifying kind of awareness. Adrenaline pricked every nerve. Fear.

His eyelids obeyed him and were open. Breath now. His eyes were open!

In the gloom, illuminated only by the dim lamp in the far corner, was a silhouetted form. It was perhaps six feet away, and stood a little over four feet tall. Two large eyes, with the quality of black ink, peered into him.

It stood, looking. Observing.

With a mind still remote and sluggish, Kelsey managed to respond. He pushed his voice out through gritted teeth, "What the fuck are you?"

He passed out.

The autumn sun was streaming in through the curtains when he awoke next. He began to move and clumsily knocked the empty bottle off the table next to him. He looked with disgust as it rolled several feet across the floor.

His head pounded and his mouth felt like he had swallowed the contents of the ashtray on the table. He made himself stand up. The memory of the night had not yet returned, but would shortly.

The dogs would need letting out, he thought. They were not here with him, he also realised.

He called them: "Maggie! Bobby!"

There would normally be the clatter of paws on hard surfaces from other rooms in the house. There was only silence.

Room after room he searched, his panic washing away the remnants of sleep. He found them in the kitchen which, being an extension to the original dwelling, was the furthest room away.

Maggie, an old Labrador, lay on her side in a puddle of urine.

"Oh no!" he groaned, falling to his knees beside her.

He placed his hands on her. She was cold, but her eyes were still open. He stroked her softly for a few moments. As he did so, events from the night came back—the helicopter, the thing with the inky-black eyes.

"Bobby!" Where's Bobby?

He looked up and around.

Bobby had backed himself into the far corner, under the kitchen table.

Shuffling over toward him on his knees, Kelsey took hold of his fur, pulled him in and instinctively wrapped him in his arms. The dog was shaking violently, but growled quietly at the door to the hallway, as if to let Kelsey know that which was here is here still.

"Brave dog," he said to him over and over, stroking his head.

It was some minutes, perhaps longer, before he felt ready to leave Bobby.

He trod silently down the hallway in a state of dissociation. There was no fear this time. Reality had receded into the distance for him.

The room at the end of the hall had once been a parlour. It was a room Kelsey did not use, except as a dumping ground for the possessions of his former life he had abandoned unpacked. Boxes lay untouched from the day he had moved in. It was dark in there. Old heavy curtains had never been opened.

The door, once closed, lay slightly ajar now.

Kelsey coldly pushed it wide.

There, in the shadows, it stood.

It gave a slight tilt of its head, as if to acknowledge his presence, as the door struck back against the wall. Again, it observed him with large black eyes, but Kelsey looked right back.

Minutes passed, neither of them moving.

"You killed my dog," he said eventually in the distant tone of unprocessed loss.

There was a reply, but one without words. Kelsey neither understood nor cared.

"I'm going to take care of my dog now," he said without using words either, but not realising it. "You do whatever it is you came to do."

Interlude From Reality

Manhandling the body of a large dog is not easy even for a young man, which Kelsey was not. Nevertheless, dislocated from reality, he walked out into the daylight with Maggie in his arms and his other dog clinging to his heels. His cottage was remote and, with his nearest neighbours being more than five miles away, it remained one of few places free of eyes and surveillance. After all, it had been why he had chosen it.

Now, under the control of some primaeval autopilot still possessed by human beings, he began to dig a grave for his dog. He gave no thought to that which remained inside. Every muscle his body possessed ached, but Kelsey simply did not care. He used a pick to get through the stony ground and, in the end, reached a depth of only three and a half feet. It had taken him the entire afternoon. It was enough.

As the sun began to set below the coastal cliffs several miles distant, Maggie was finally covered over with stone and earth.

He stayed with Bobby into the evening, before returning indoors.

Over the next few days, life continued surreally on but kept its distance from reality. Kelsey had pulled the door to the room shut at some point. He did not look in. The creature was simply left there.

The hours passed as he sat in his chair, unmoving, with his mind switched off or asleep. The wall, it seemed, held a special quality that eased the passage of time. The hours turned into a day, then two and then three.

There was no sound or movement from the room.

He rose from the chair only to do the most basic tasks. He didn't eat, but took food out to his dog. At night, Bobby slept in the shed, but lay beside Maggie in the day.

It was on the fourth day that there was a change in things. It was if there had been a power cut, but now with the sudden restoration of electricity, Kelsey's mind powered up and started a reboot sequence.

His property was fed by mains electricity, but had oil fired heating and a septic tank. One would need filling and other emptying, he thought absently minded. He should place orders for them before winter. There was a repair to the guttering

that needed doing. And the window frames—where they weathered from the west—needed repainting.

Then he wondered why it had not occurred to him to contact anyone about the thing in the room. The authorities perhaps? At first, the question seemed like a trivial one, like he was asking himself why he hadn't been out to the supermarket or refilled his car.

But then enormity began to yawn.

The creature had been familiar to Kelsey in the sense of popular science fiction. The stereotype of "little green men" had been supplanted by that of the "Grey" over recent decades.

What am I meant to do?, he asked himself, bitterly. *Upload a fucking video to Youtube?*

The web was awash with fake CGI content anyway.

Who would believe it?

Even if the police, or whoever came, then what? He had long since lost all trust in the establishment.

Would he be made to simply disappear?

That would be easy for them, he figured, given how cut off he was now.

Without Words

He found the creature sitting on an unpacked cardboard box, one of many he had abandoned. It had been sitting there all this time, with its head down, not moving. It lifted it now to look silently up as the door swung slowly open a second time.

He took several steps into the room, and simply stood for a time.

It peered at him from behind those eyes. He thought he saw it blink once, but wasn't sure.

He took two more steps and stopped again. *It's been here for several days*, he rationalised.

The skin was smooth, and it didn't seem to be wearing clothing. He noticed small things—it had no apparent genitalia. Three fingers and a thumb on each hand, with only two toes on the feet. It didn't appear to be carrying any devices.

Kelsey closed the final gap.

He didn't say it, but thought it out loud: "Can I touch you?"

Strange, how he had just known to do that—how he had known that he didn't have to actually speak to it.

There was an answer of some kind, but one which cannot easily be explained, for it was an answer of a different kind. It's reply hadn't been "yes" or "no," but something else. Indifference? Rather, the answer lay on a line in an orthogonal direction unknown.

Again, there had been no words.

It wasn't a "no," Kelsey concluded after a few moments.

In the gloom, with the light from the doorway, he bent down and reached forward. A first fingertip made contact with the face below the eye. He ran his hand across its skin.

Its nose was flat—there was no nose—but there were nostrils. He made out that there was a discharge of what appeared to be mucus from each.

That was enough, and he pulled back. He retraced his steps in a backward motion to the door.

Out in the open air, he sat with his dog while he processed

the nature of things. The sky was overcast, but there were occasional patches of blue. Strong winds caused the clouds to break, casting fast moving shadows across the land. His dog had been a stray and was used to the outdoors. Kelsey hugged himself to keep warm.

Academia had not been the place in which one could entertain unconventional thinking. Theories concerning exo-biospheres, microbes and abstract possibilities of life were safe so long as they did not descend into fantasies of actual aliens in flying saucers.

All that was part of another life and another time. Irrelevant in the here and now, he thought.

Here it was now. *And why was it here?*

It surely hadn't come simply to kill his dog and then hole itself up in his storeroom for no reason. Maggie had been old, he knew. It was likely that she had literally been scared to death.

"I didn't know what else," he vocalised as he entered the room again, sometime later. He moved slowly and placed a glass of water in the vicinity of the Grey. His words, however, continued dryly on in his mind – *Cornflakes? A bacon butty?*

The realisation struck immediately that it had read that too. There was no reply, except one which simply let him know that it had understood.

Just how much did it know from him?

The Grey did indeed consume the water. He never saw it drink, but noted the level as it went down in small quantities between visits. He refilled it.

Kelsey had questions now which quickly turned into a flood. The alien understood them, but gave little in a way he could make sense of. It did, however, get better at replying in the

affirmative or negative, but only to certain queries.

Water was OK. It didn't want food. The dark was better.

There was nothing about why it was here but, "no," it did not wish to leave the room.

It was as if, Kelsey wondered, its thoughts were highly compressed, comprising multiple concepts simultaneously expressed as tightly wound packages that could not be fathomed. In communicating with him, it had to unpack things and lay them out linearly for him.

When not engaging him, the Grey remained motionless with its head down. Kelsey wondered whether it was sleeping or just conserving energy.

Communication seemed to exhaust it.

It had no visible orifices, except in the head. It had no anus or urinary tract. It produced no waste.

Kelsey's attention was drawn frequently to its mouth. It lacked teeth or a tongue, but there was a mandible. The lips were thin, and the mouth had an almost human quality to it. Too human, perhaps, for a creature which had presumably evolved entirely independently from us.

The mucus discharge seemed to get worse. The Grey allowed him to wipe it, but didn't have any inclination to do it itself. He wondered whether the substance should be analysed somehow. Biology wasn't his field, and he realised that he didn't care about it anyway. He dropped the idea.

In an early experiment, he tried taking his laptop into the room. He wasn't sure what he was expecting—perhaps the alien might point to a star system, or they'd communicate using mathematics or something. It showed no willingness to engage, and simply ignored him. The idea suddenly seemed ridiculous and he retreated, leaving it alone for a time.

Later, it told him that it did not wish for technology. With effort, it laid things out in human digestible form, or one could say that it explained.

It didn't think human technology was primitive. It disliked all technology. He sensed a qualia resembling that of disgust.

He wanted to know whether more Greys would come to the house.

"No more Greys will come."

It would not elaborate more on this, but told him: *No, it would not harm Bobby. Maggie was regretted. Not intentional.*

In the meantime, Kelsey spent more time with his remaining dog. He cleaned the house and poured his stock of alcohol down the drain which he no longer felt any inclination to touch. He cut his hair with trimmers, and shaved off the beard that had grown over the past year or so.

He found he could grieve over Maggie now.

Bobby still would not enter the house. In response, Kelsey took him on frequent walks to the coast. He tried reaching the alien when outdoors, but could not. The effect seemed to attenuate with distance.

Communication was becoming easier, but it was clear that was holding some things back. He wasn't certain whether this was deliberate, or whether it simply took too much effort to transfer them. Nevertheless, it would answer some questions freely. Answers weren't in words, but in thoughts which could now be understood as words.

He had been wondering just how much of his mind the Grey could actually read. That was how he discovered that it had a sense of humour.

"My head is crawling with broken glass, and I'm not sure I want you in there," he had told it.

It had let him know that what was in his head was OK, but it was amused by the metaphor—especially how it he had mixed it. It liked how humans used metaphors.

“How do Grey’s use metaphors?”

“With more precision.”

It never asked questions of him. It seemed that there was nothing it needed to ask or wanted of him, save a place just to be.

First Disclosure

By the end of the second week, things had developed into question and answer sessions on a range of topics. Many questions yielded nothing, with others receiving only partial responses.

“Travel is not done how you think.”

“You fold space-time?”

“Not as you would imagine.”

“How so?”

The line went dead.

The following day, Kelsey came back to a subject which troubled him. Beside the small quantities of water, it consumed nothing.

“Do you eat?”

The Grey did not reply.

“Is there anything here that you need? Anything I could get you?”

It was a question asked previously, but with no answer. There was a long pause, but then it gave one this time.

"Not necessary. Time here is limited."

There was a moment of telepathic silence. Before Kelsey could respond, the moment was interrupted.

Bobby had entered the house. He was standing now in the hallway, at the door, with the fur on his back upright. He snarled viciously with fangs drawn to their full extent.

The Grey drooped.

Taking hold of him by the fur of his neck, Kelsey dragged the dog down the hallway. Bobby became frenzied, and twisted and turned violently in his grip. He had no collar but, being a young dog, still had loose skin around his neck to which Kelsey held. The dog pushed himself upright on his back legs against the direction he was being pulled and almost escaped the grip.

There was a precarious moment when Kelsey had to release a hand in order to open the door.

Finally, with Bobby on the outside, he stood resting his forehead against it from the inside. The dog continued to bark and scratch frantically. Eventually things subsided.

The Grey did not lift its head as when Kelsey returned to the room.

"I'm sorry," he said to it, but non-vocally.

It responded. There were a number of things he now just knew from it.

The Grey was one of a team deposited in the vicinity on the first night. The nature of their mission was not fully expressed, but it indicated that it wasn't something Kelsey

would regard as being good. The helicopter was military, and their activity had been interrupted. This, however, was not a problem. Evasion of human technology was trivial. Others had left.

“But won’t they come back for you?”

The information dump had exhausted it, but it answered again after a few moments.

“No. Greys will not come back for me.”

“But why would your people allow you to fall into human hands?”

“Not important,” it replied. “Human governments have many Greys in possession.”

The alien remained motionless as Kelsey took all that in. He could hear Bobby barking outside.

“What did you mean when you said time here is limited?”

Then suddenly he understood that too. Suddenly he knew—this Grey had intentionally marooned itself and was expecting to go nowhere.

Part Two

Bobby

Kelsey started to bring his dog into the house. He had explained his thinking to the Grey. The door to the room would remain closed and Bobby would be allowed into the hall for short durations.

The idea was to familiarise the dog with that which was unfamiliar.

On the first try, he went berserk again. On the second, he remained aggressive but took a sniff from under the door.

Kelsey queried the Grey about its ability to communicate with animals. Yes, telepathic communication was possible, it explained, but was less developed than with humans. Abstract concepts were not possible—only qualia was possible. Bobby was afraid, but his fear was no longer as heightened as it had been previously. He was distressed over Maggie and, in his own way, knew now where the blame lay.

It had not attempted any communication with his dog other than being aware of his emotional state. It could calm him if Kelsey wished it, but was uncomfortable with the idea for reasons it did not elaborate.

“Do you regard Bobby as being a ‘lesser’ creature?”

It replied that it did not, in the way that he had meant it, but other Greys would because Greys regard all livings as ‘lesser’ to that of life itself. Kelsey did not understand this.

Over time, however, Bobby’s aggression subsided and his behaviour calmed to that of growling and sniffing at the foot of the door. Kelsey wasn’t sure whether the Grey had anything to do with it or not.

It transpired that the mucus discharge was being caused by prolonged exposure to terrestrial dust, and all the things living in it. That was one problem which could be alleviated at least, and Kelsey emptied the room and mopped the floorboards and surfaces. The Grey had not asked him to do this. A few boxes were left as furniture.

“No, alien microbes not harmful,” it replied to his question. It was more a case of things being the other way around.

No, it did not need to lie down. No, it wasn’t cold. It did

not wish for a blanket.

A Thing Made, Not Born

Kelsey wanted to know more about the alien's eyes, and it explained that it was wearing what could be described as contact lenses or, perhaps, more accurately as sunglasses.

Its eyesight was extremely sensitive and required protection from both sunlight and the artificial lighting made by humans. What covered the eyes was a polarising film which filtered out much of the visible spectrum. That was why they appeared black to him. It was also sensitive toward the red-end of the spectrum. It could see perfectly well in the darkened room.

Behind the lenses, however, were eyes not dissimilar to his own. They were perhaps three times larger, but there was an iris and lens behind the dark film. In fact, the overall design was the same as in humans and Kelsey found that this knowledge affected him somehow.

The Grey was neither male nor female but, nevertheless, was beginning to be a thing a little less alien to him. It understood irony very well and increasingly displayed a sense of humour.

And Grey's did indeed consume food.

It explained that it had a small stomach and a short intestine which was closed. Anything consumed, therefore, had to be fully absorbed for there was no exit chute. The Greys consumed food in liquid form, which they manufactured. Certain substances of terrestrial origin could be consumed but technology, the nature of which remained unclear, was required for the removal of waste from the body.

Moreover, Greys were used to extended periods of inactivity. In this state, the requirement for water was tiny. The period

could be much longer if not for the exertion of communicating with Kelsey, but there was no sense of bitterness or regret in what it told him.

He understood that it was not only starving, but was slowly being poisoned by the accumulation of waste by-products which had no place to go. It would be poisoned before it starved, and to eat would only accelerate the process.

“How long?”

“Uncertain.”

“A week? Two? Longer?”

“Weeks.” But only if it remained motionless.

Communication should be limited to extend life, but it now wished for dialogue for as long as biology permitted. There had been a subtle change in things.

He returned to the question of “why”.

Why had it come to him in this way, only to die here?

“Escape.”

“From what? Help me understand.”

With that, he knew its reality. Greys were made, not born. Some of their physiology had been engineered and altered over time, including how they digested food. While some Greys were specialised for certain tasks, every one was a clone that had been stamped out of some kind of biological mould.

Their technological heritage was old—millions of years—but had long since stagnated. Their individual lifespan, by human standards, was long also but most did not see what could be regarded as old age. Everything the Greys made or used was disposable, including the vehicles they travelled in and even themselves.

If Greys were clones, Kelsey wanted to know what had made this Grey special? Why had it chosen suicide as a form of escape?

It indicated that it would answer him, but later.

With that it lowered its head. The dialogue was over for now.

Things Unknown

There was a television in Kelsey's home, but it lay disconnected. He had used it to watch DVD's for a time, but they had quickly become old on him. Living as he did, he had become accustomed to silence and nothing more. He had brought Bobby into the living room. The dog had paused at the door to give a short growl in a manner which now seemed almost comical. It had become Bobby's little ritual.

He sat quietly, stroking his dog, while contemplating on the nature of things disclosed. Dark questions circulated. Some disturbed him.

It occurred to him how matter-of-factly he had accepted the telepathic nature of their communication.

Inside its skull, he knew, were four 'quartiles' rather than two hemispheres. The brain had been augmented somehow for the purpose of what he understood to be telepathy. The explanation of how this worked lay in an ocean of science he was yet to have any conception of. There were many things now which he knew from the creature, but there at least as many things he did not.

Could it be that it remained in contact with other Greys even though it had told him that it was not?

Although diminutive in form, it was a thing of fearsome knowledge and intellect. It had indicated that Greys used human beings, coming and going as they pleased. It had not

elaborated on the how or why of it.

That led to the possibility of its presence here being part of an elaborate experiment on him. It seemed, however, to be actually enjoying his company now. Was all this part of some cruel manipulation for reasons unknown?

It understood human beings and their affairs at least as well as he did. What could the Greys possibly hope to get from him that they did not already possess?

What? His knowledge of solar physics?

It preferred telepathic communication, but could understand what it had called “vocalics”, or at least that was the word which had formed in his mind for him. This information had in no way surprised him. Neither would it surprise him if it turned out that it could read and write as well.

In any case, what could he do about any of it? *Flee? Kill it?*

The image of him trying to stab it in the neck with a potato peeler came in mind.

He laughed at himself dryly.

Gods of Aliens

It had heard him talking to Bobby outside the window the previous day, and had found it amusing.

“You’re not to bite it,” he had said, wagging a finger in the dog’s face. “Are you listening? No biting.”

“Did he understand me?” Kelsey asked, curiously.

“He seeks to please. He understands that my presence here is to be accepted.”

"That's good, I guess."

"Yes, there is a bond between the dog and you. It is good."

Then, for the first time, it asked him a question.

"My presence here *is* accepted, is it not?"

"Strange you ask when you already know what's in my head."

"I know," it replied. "But perhaps I should not."

"I quit drinking when you came here," Kelsey said. "Strange that. Did you have anything to do with it by any chance?"

"I did not."

"But you can implant thoughts and ideas. You could control as well?"

"Control, in the way that you mean it, is not permitted."

"Permitted? Not permitted by whom?"

"By others who are not Greys."

That was big, Kelsey thought. He sensed the sand suddenly move under his feet.

"Explain?" he replied simply.

"There are many civilisations, as you imagined. Many come here, but in ways you had not."

"How do they come?" he asked, realising this was the verge of something.

"The point at which technology becomes sufficient for travel between stars is also the point at which such travel becomes unnecessary."

This, he contemplated, represented the first crack in what had

long stood as an impenetrable mystery.

“Unnecessary? What do you mean?”

It indicated that a full answer would take time. Other concepts had to be sown first.

He came at it from a different angle: “Greys travel. You travelled here?”

“Yes,” it replied. “Greys are imprisoned in ways others are not.”

“Imprisoned? Do these ‘others’ imprison the Greys?”

“Greys imprison themselves.”

“Is that why you came here? Suicide as a form of escape from imprisonment?”

What came back was simple and complex at the same time. It contained amusement at the irony present in the literal truth when expressed using human language—truth and irony in equal measure—but orthogonal direction.

“Suicide less fatal.”

But there was more. The imprisonment was not a physical one, but one of the mind. It really had meant what it said. Kelsey’s own mind was starting to unpack things on its own. He was beginning to understand without it having to do all the work. The exchange was actually happening very quickly now.

“Greys do not possess humour, do they? But you do, don’t you?”

“Humour was possible in Greys but has atrophied. I was shown-taught by other. I have also learned much from you.”

This Grey had been exposed to human beings and their mode of thinking, including Kelsey’s own. But there was an ‘other’ with which it had been communicating for some time, and in a

way which paralleled how the Grey communicated with Kelsey.

The 'other' was a thing neither singular nor plural in nature, he understood, but something else.

"This other... is *this* what told you to escape? To come here?"

"Not 'told' in the way that you mean it. The ability to conceive the idea was given. The choice was given, you may say. I could not foresee the outcome of my action. I therefore chose it as a means of de-control, which was that which was suggested."

"You mean you did a random thing, not knowing what would happen? Is that it?"

"Greys have long sought prescience and control over all things. The universe has limits on this which the Greys no longer know how to accept. The over application of control, however, is fatal in the long-term through the loss of entropy—a concept with which you are familiar but are yet to understand. Yes, I did a thing that could not be predicted. Nor did I foresee the nature of our interaction that would be born of it."

Everything Kelsey thought he knew about things had been turned upside down. It was yet to be folded inside out.

"This other..." he asked again but with incredulity, "is this God?"

"Not God, but mind-spirit complex of ancient origin that is closer to God."

Aubrey

Aubrey did not look at him. He had picked 'Aubrey' because, being neither male or female specific, the name had just

seemed apt.

"Well, what is it you want me to call you then? ... *Yoda*?"

He knew it was laughing silently and trying not show it.

The name 'Aubrey' stuck.

There had been more discussion on the nature of what Aubrey had referred to as a 'mind-spirit complex.' The implications were staggering. The universe was no longer what Kelsey had understood it to be.

Aubrey often referred to 'space-time' and 'time-space' as different realities. It told him that there were multiple layers of existence permeating the universe that interacted only weakly. In this one, our one, travel through time is restricted, but relatively free through space. In the others, things were reversed in complex ways that Kelsey did not understand. However, gravity was a common factor to all them.

"Where did this mind-spirit complex originate?" he asked.

"Here," Aubrey replied, simply.

"You mean on Earth?"

"Not Earth. Venus."

The Russians had landed spacecraft on Venus in the mid-1970s. The surface conditions were discovered to be uniquely hostile to life.

"But Venus is a dead world," Kelsey said.

"It wasn't always so. You already suspected it."

Indeed, he had.

He already knew that Venus had been subject to catastrophic volcanic activity sometime in its distant past and it was this

which almost certainly created the thick toxic atmosphere it possessed today. In fact, he had once been interested in whether the sun's increasing activity, despite the planet's weak magnetic field, had been what lay behind Venus's apparent and sudden planet-wide resurfacing event.

So much was still unknown about Venus, however.

Venus had, indeed, been a habitable world long before things crawled out of the oceans on Earth, he now knew from Aubrey. As if to answer the question which was just beginning to form in his mind, he also saw that the planet's slow rotation had been the thing which had once kept its surface cool, despite being somewhat closer to the sun than Earth. A day on Venus lasted the equivalent of months, even back then, with water clouds blanketing its day side which promptly cleared on the night side.

But everything on Venus had died with the destruction of its atmosphere or, at least that is how he understood it, and this had occurred around the same time there had been an explosion in the complexity of life on Earth. The implication was that this planetary system had given rise to more than one technological civilisation in its time.

"And what happened to the mind-spirit complex?" he asked in awe.

"It remains on Venus still, and here on this body... and others also."

He was not quite ready for that.

"Here? How?"

"Many individuals left to travel in space-time early in their technological development. Others remained, and ultimately entered time-space, thus becoming one but not one. This is the thing sought by Greys."

More Life

The days rolled by and Aubrey's condition began to deteriorate. Bobby often came to the door to peer in, but would not enter.

Kelsey began to think much about what Aubrey's loss would mean now. It was then Aubrey made a shocking suggestion.

"Time is short, but extension is possible."

"You mean an extension to your life?"

"Yes, of life in time."

Kelsey wondered what Aubrey meant by "in time" but, before he could finish the thought, his mind turned to ones which were darker and more pragmatic in nature ... *would it entail draining him of his bodily fluids so that Aubrey could live?*

Aubrey indicated that, "no," it wasn't going to involve such a thing. It found how the human mind could conjure up such possibilities intriguing. It was, however, going to be something that he would find suitably dramatic nevertheless.

"Tell me what you need?"

A flood entered Kelsey's consciousness. No words, but there was everything down to the temperature of the water and the things that would be needed—petroleum jelly, lots of it, and a scalpel or sharp knife.

"Oh my God," he said out loud, understanding.

Aubrey's skin was synthetic and had to come off.

Part Three

Oban

The universe had certainly changed for Dr. Adrien Kelsey since Aubrey's arrival. His surroundings seemed superficial in a new kind of way.

He stood now in the car park of the supermarket in Oban, the nearest town and point of civilisation. The nights were drawing in rapidly and the sky was already overcast and dark. There were lights in the windows of the traditional stone dwellings, common in Scotland, which overlooked the modern car park and its utilitarian structures with their veneer of corporate branding. It was raining lightly.

Bobby didn't travel well. He was excited and, left unsecured, would try to get between Kelsey and the steering wheel. He sat sniffing the air from the small gap left open for him at the rear seat window.

Kelsey had managed get most of the things that were needed.

Aubrey needed sugar, and syrup was going to be the primary source. Animal fats could also be consumed, but nothing solid. Everything had to be fully absorbed. Cocoa powder was a particular request. It wasn't the Cocoa itself that Aubrey needed, but the copper it contained.

It was difficult to source a scalpel. The art shop had been closed. Instead, he had fresh blades for his Stanley knife.

Acquiring a significant quantity of petroleum jelly had been surprisingly difficult. The supermarket sold them now only as 'Vaseline' in finger sized pots. He had to visit several pharmacies in the town.

"Are these for yourself?" the woman behind the perspex screen had asked in the first one, a larger chain store. He looked

down at the accumulation of jars on the counter and realised that it had been a mistake to try to buy all of them.

There was flesh underneath Aubrey's bio-synthetic exterior that was unused to being exposed and would dessicate if left unprotected. The petroleum jelly would be used as a substitute barrier.

"No, they are for an alien being that is staying with me at the moment," he did not say. Instead, he explained that he lived remotely and often bought things in bulk.

"You're only allowed to buy one," she had replied matter of factly, while making it clear that it was pointless to argue.

He had better luck at an independent pharmacy and had a total of eight jars now. More would be needed, but they could be purchased in bulk online later.

Flesh, Blood and Bone

Kelsey released Bobby from his anchor point in the rear of the car once they got clear of the town. His dog rode the rest of the way back with his head sticking out of the passenger window enjoying the wind.

During the return, Kelsey reflected on how he had begun to think of Aubrey as a 'she' ever since he had named it. It had responded that there was no concept of sex differences in Greys themselves, although they understood it in humans and others. It was OK with being a 'she', if Kelsey preferred that. It made no difference.

She did not lift her head as usual when Kelsey returned to the room. It was he who did that with both hands under Aubrey's chin.

"Urgency required," she said non-vocally, "hesitation is not."

She weighed no more than 90 lbs. He knew what needed to be done. Things had already been explained to him.

This was the first time Aubrey left the room. He made it to the top of the stairs with her in his arms and pushed open the door to bathroom. He laid her gently down on the tiled floor and started the taps on the bath immediately.

"No scalpel. Stanley knife?"

There was no reply, but Kelsey took that as a "yes."

He left her briefly and hurried out to the shed to find the knife. Outside, Bobby looked up from his spot beside Maggie. He sensed that things were afoot.

Kelsey grabbed the other items that would be needed on his way back.

The bath was nearly full now. He handed the blade to Aubrey, who lay face up. He wasn't going to do this bit, he already knew that.

Whatever reserves Aubrey had, she used them now and took the knife dexterously out his hand. Three fingers were no handicap. Without hesitation, she made a long incision vertically down her own torso to the point between the legs. She made a further incision horizontally across the chest and, switching hands, down each arm.

Kelsey watched silently. The skin, he understood, was not her own. Quite how things looked underneath, he was yet to witness. The incisions being made were precise, but he wondered how much this hurt, if at all. It was a shocking sight, nevertheless.

His turn would come shortly.

More incisions were made, including one from the back of the neck. He helped by lifting Aubrey's enlarged head off the

floor while it was done. A cut was made over the top of the head, down between the oversized eyes and to the neck. He held her forward as she did the legs.

She had finished.

He pushed a finger under the grey outer skin where two cuts met on her chest. It was about two millimetres thick here.

"It's OK. Do it now."

He peeled it back.

There was a sticky substance underneath the outer skin. The distinct smell of ammonia reached him as it came away. In places, Aubrey had cut deeper than intended and there was blood. The blood was a dark red—almost brown. *What was he expecting?*

Under the skin, Aubrey was not grey, but a light shade of pink. The flesh was not unlike his own, but had rarely seen the light of day. There were no nipples, but she had a ribcage, collarbone and, turning her over, he saw shoulder blades. The arms were disproportionately long for her body, but the realisation struck him that the overall body plan was the same as any mammal on Earth. With the exception of the hands and feet, she had a bone for every one he had.

These creatures had been travelling between the stars long before apes had walked upright on Earth. Aubrey had come from a distant place using technology beyond anything he understood. And yet, underneath it all, was a little thing of flesh, blood and bone.

The realisation affected him deeply, but it would have to wait until later, he thought.

Now, he was seeing many small white filaments, like hairs, that connected between the synthetic outer layer and into the living flesh underneath. They were simply pulled out as the

outer layer came away as a sheet.

"Does this hurt you?"

"It matters not."

The hands, feet and head were left for later. He had to get Aubrey into the water now. He lifted her from the floor and plunged her into the warm water of the bath.

Bobby had managed to get into the house. He had long figured out how to open the back door by standing on his hind legs and depressing the handle, which Kelsey had forgot to lock in his haste. He could hear him sniffing under the bathroom door from the outside at the top of the stairs.

Almost immediately, the water began to turn brown with substances emanating out of Aubrey's tiny body. This was how it was done—osmosis through the skin. The smell was overpowering.

Ocean

Aubrey was covered head-to-toe in petroleum jelly and wrapped in a duvet, as Kelsey carried her down the stairs.

"Cold now," she said.

She was warm blooded but, without the bio-synthetic outer skin, her body had difficulty regulating temperature. The cuts to her body were not deep, but would not stop bleeding and there was dark blood on the duvet. The petroleum jelly had helped and they would eventually heal, but it would take a very long time, she told him.

Bobby followed, trying to sniff what was wrapped inside the bundle.

Back inside the room, Aubrey needed water. She would need much

more from now on. He tried to hold the glass, but she indicated that she could do that for herself and took small sips.

Bobby stretched forward, still unsure, trying to sniff her. She held out a three-fingered hand for him.

Kelsey fetched more duvets and blankets, and fired up the boiler.

Over the days, Aubrey began to eat and Kelsey did not envy her diet—syrup and small quantities of lard which she allowed to melt in her mouth. The diet would need to improve as Aubrey's body needed protein and many other substances. There were discussions on this and Kelsey made up a 'sugary broth' according to instruction.

She liked Lucozade, but only if it was flat. Immersion in water would need to be repeated periodically, but the exercise would not be as traumatic as the first.

The last remaining fragments of bio-skin on her hands and feet were removed. She had no finger nails, he noted. The black polarising film over her eyes would remain as the eyes could not survive exposure to the air. Underneath the film, however, she assured him that her eyes were grey.

Aubrey was now learning to appreciate simple pleasures, the nature of which were once alien to her, and asked Kelsey a rather unexpected question.

She asked if he would take her to see the ocean.

"Of course," he had replied.

They visited the coast, several days later, in the early hours when they were sure not to encounter anyone else.

With the bio-skin removed, her feet were sensitive and they tried out several pairs of oversized human boots. That was

when he learned that she actually four digits in her feet but the bones had been allowed to fuse so that, in effect, there were only two rather thick toes.

For the first time, Kelsey discovered that he knew a thing which she did not—she didn't know how to tie human shoelaces. She needed only a single demonstration, however.

The hands of a Grey were, indeed, different to that of a human. It wasn't simply that she had only three fingers and an opposable thumb, but rather the muscles used for their articulation were entirely located in the hands themselves rather than the forearm. It meant that Aubrey's hands were weak, but more dextrous than his own. The difference was evident in how she tied the other boot herself—with lightening precision.

Communication was now fluent between them, and she read his curiosity. She explained that, while much of their early genetic heritage was shared, there had been much divergence since the exodus from Venus aeons ago, not to mention some deliberate alteration.

“If you were going engage in bio-hacking, why didn't you give yourself two opposable thumbs?” he asked with his characteristically dry humour. “Then you'd be able tie your shoelaces with just one hand.”

She understood the joke.

They made the short journey by car on the first outing, but she did not enjoy the motion of the vehicle made for humans. Travel in vehicles made by Greys was motionless to its occupants through what Kelsey understood to be antigravity precisely applied to counteract its acceleration. Without it, the acceleration of their craft would easily be capable of reducing any living thing inside to pulp—or the craft might even be a spinner, depending on the design. Inside, it made no difference—there would be no sensation of motion whatsoever.

She was dressed in several layers of child-sized thermal undergarments, which Kelsey had managed to buy in Oban, and wore a heavy child's coat over the top with a hood. In fact, from a distance, she looked very much like a human child. In any case, there was no other soul within six miles of them.

At night, she could see the ocean better than he, but they could both discern the swell as the waves lapped against the shoreline well enough. The moon made a brief appearance between the clouds, and they left just before the first signs of dawn.

On the next occasion, she would walk the distance to the sea herself.

The Light in the Darkness

Over time, Aubrey's body adapted somewhat to being without its synthetic skin. She remained fragile, however, with her airways prone to terrestrial infection.

The exchange Kelsey and she shared had always been both ways. Kelsey's mind was busy assimilating concepts previously imaginable, while she had drawn from him new ways of relating to things and a new way of being. It was a simpler one for her, but one that was richer in a way she had previously been unable to conceptualise either.

During the winter months, Kelsey unpacked the boxes that had lain in the room untouched. Many possessions of his former existence were discarded but, amongst them, he found treasures of the past. This was how they discovered that Aubrey liked books and tales of human adventure.

He had dug out "Treasure Island," a book which had once belonged to Kelsey's own father during his childhood during the 1960s. The simple physical nature of a book, containing

nothing more than phonetic symbols, intrigued her in a way that would be analogous, perhaps, to how a 21st century programmer may be drawn to the idea of a Victorian computer. Within its pages were drawings and scribbles made by Kelsey's father when he had been a child so many years ago.

Kelsey knew, however, that Aubrey was older than many of the books they now read together.

While they read many books, it was stories of Earth's seas that held her fascination, along with the risk-seeking mindsets of creatures which had once navigated them in vessels constructed of mere wood and sail.

Bobby lay with them, sleeping beside the fire. Kelsey read, while she followed his conscious flow. They were three very different creatures with so much to share.

They were not alone...

For there was yet another presence with them which was as different again as they were from each other. The physical act of marooning herself here had been easy. The conception that had made it a possibility had not—that possibility had been illuminated for her. The entity with them now had been the one to hold out the light in the darkness which Aubrey had followed.

She would not live long, Kelsey understood. They would have the winter and, perhaps, the summer.

Kelsey's world had been illuminated also. He knew now that the universe was of a fundamentally different nature to the one he had hitherto understood with such limiting certainty. It did, indeed, have another side which was as every bit as real as this one.

When the end came, Aubrey promised to wait for him there.

This is a work of pure fiction. It is highly improbable that you could actually befriend a Grey.

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