Totipotent

Caught in a trap.

Catherine Krahe

One cell is not enough to speak or think. Perception is intermittent and mostly chemical. But one cell can remember.

The plantlet sits on a culture plate with a dozen dying samples. It has been one cell, and each day brings a new memory to the surface. It remembers the knives and the flames. It remembers the pin guns and such pain. It remembers Bea, the hands the scent the voice, and it remembers Bea, the Monkey, who tore him to pieces and left him behind, and he remembers Bea, his partner, who scraped green from under her fingernails and walked out of the lab.

He remembers Bea.

He has ends now, root and shoot. He has differentiated cells. He does not look like the Flytrap he is, but he can perceive.

There is light, and there is Bea. She smells cold, afraid, fierce. Someone moves him to a new dish.

One cell cannot act; a mass of photosynthetic tissue can hope. Mimosa, Mosy, remembers.

He remembers talking. He remembers Bea, Bea panting, Bea bleeding, Bea becoming still while her scent changed from tenacity to bewilderment and sorrow. He remembers... he remembers fighting while Bea ran for the lifeboat. He remembers pin guns and how his partner would die forever.

He has leaves now. He has appendages. He looks like a Flytrap.

Bea is alive. Mosy can hear her again.

"Hey," Mosy can't answer; this part of him doesn't have a mouth yet. "They say you're gonna pull through." A gripping tendril curls towards the Monkey. *His* Monkey. "I talked with the rest of you. You wanted to be bigger before you came back. You'll tell me when you're ready, right? It's not the same talking to the rest of you. They weren't there. You, I mean."

Monkeys do not live like Flytraps. A

Flytrap cut in two feels two wounds, roots starving and sending up leaves, leaves thirsty and wilted, struggling to make roots. They remain separate, yet think and act as one. Mimosa has three greenhouses on three planets; the dozen cells that never multiplied are no loss. He remembers all that he does, and once he is near the rest of him, so will he. Like all Flytraps, he sends cuttings, plantlets filled with knowledge, to each greenhouse, spreading the word, the thoughts, the memories.

Bea is afraid of the greenhouses now. Mosy can hear her voice shake when she talks about the part of him that lives there.

Mosy has a pot, heavy white and black ceramic. Bea brought it to tell him they're not moving. The Monkey carries him to his private greenhouse. Halfway there, he discovers and remembers the months of waiting and months in gel, months in space and glass and multiple homecomings. He screams and the plantlet in Bea's hands hears it vibrate through the hall. He remembers sending Bea away after two uncomfortable visits and understands both why he did so and why it was so cruel. The plantlet grown from a few battered cells has become part of Mosy. Bea puts the pot

on a table and sits in her chair by the frost-etched glass.

Mosy wants to touch her from all sides. Bea flinches away, but reaches for the crooked plant in the white and black pot.

"I don't want you going out there again," Mosy says. His partner jumps.

"Why not? You told me to leave before."

He remembers this. He thought it would be good for the unhappy Monkey. Now he remembers the fighting and flushes purple at the danger. The memory — hiding, both wounded, Bea's confession — Mosy thinks of thorns and cells divide within him.

"If you die, you die forever," he says. The confession during the fight. He will hold Bea here if he has to.

"That's the usual way of it."

Mosy shudders; Bea doesn't react as the greenhouse trembles. "Please don't. I couldn't — it will hurt."

"Mosy —" Bea stands and pets a tendril. She tastes warm and upset.

"If you die you die forever. And I'll have to know. I'll have to tell the rest of me how it happened. I'll find out again and again."

"I have to stay here so you don't cry?" Bea moves further into Mosy's greenhouse. "Death happens no

matter what. You can have me on a ship with you or alone —"

"With me down here!"

"— alone, because I'm not staying! We're partners, and that means we go up together. Or we go alone. And Monkeys die."

She leaves. Mosy shakes for hours. He doesn't know how to tell the rest of him. He doesn't know how to keep Bea safe. Monkeys die forever. Bea will die forever.

If he does not touch the windows, he can pretend it isn't cold outside. The greenhouse stays warm long after dark. It is no comfort.

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