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When Crucis had begun bringing his gifts, Valle had burnt them every time. Nevermind that destroying legal tender was illegal and very detectable: when the Aequitas Army had arrested him after the first, they had quietly and anxiously released him as soon as they'd run his ID. Nor was it possible to give it away anonymously. He had abandoned some, but the tagged bills, knowing who had last possessed them, had been returned to him every time. Now he used Crucis's money to fund his relocation.

He had thought the very bottom of Atlantis would keep Crucis's eyes off him, and maybe it had for a while. At this point it seemed that Valle himself was incapable of laying low. He thought at first that he might move inward, abandon his apartment in the wallflower tenement and find somewhere to live a hundred miles farther into the ocean-bottom city. Maybe even ground level. Even if Atlantis was only a fraction the size of either of the formerly terrestrial cities, it was still vast and offered infinite opportunities to hide. It was the money that made him dismiss that idea, though. He couldn't use a fraction of it fleeing into the city, and he needed it gone. There would be no living in quiet luxury, spending the evil money bit by bit (though Valle fully suspected that would be the inevitable end of his years of running—would Crucis consider it a victory in this game?). Therefore, he was going up.

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When the tunnels between the two cities were built, Atlantis sprang up around the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a waypoint for repairs and supplies roughly halfway between terminals. It grew rapidly from there, running far down the side of the ridge into the depths; for the better, since the original city was rent apart by earthquakes. The city as it had been for centuries was a vertical pillar four hundred miles wide and three miles tall, with a satellite dome buoyed another mile above. That last was the only part of the city that saw sunlight in the ocean outside, dim as it was.

Though it was technically only a short distance, travel from the bottom up to the rail station at the city's peak had to take three days, to account for the difference in air pressure. Vertrains crawled glacially up tracks that stretched the height of the city, their motion scarcely perceptible from a distance. They were shaped like stacks of round, white cylinders that engulfed their tracks, deep grooves separating each car. Valle bought himself space aboard one, a cabin in a car near the top of the vertrain.

He had to wait more than a day for it to arrive and unload, which he spent on a bench in the vertrain station nearest his now-former apartment.

On the bench facing him was a team of young Lookatmes, playing drums and low-toned flutes and singing songs of Osah while they danced in brightly colored shawls and skirts.

Look at me Osah

See how I move under the waves

Turn your eye to me God the Watcher

Judge me and everyone worthy

Their music was grating and it never ended, but Valle made no move to get away from it. He wanted the same thing, after all.

One of them, a squamate zoan, smiled at Valle and tapped two fingers on each eye, the sign of the Watcher. He looked away. They couldn't know that they were totally safe from Osah's wrath, that their little band's prayers neither grabbed some deity's attention nor assured him that they didn't deserve death. Random decimation did happen, but there was no protection from that.

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He could tell her things about Osah. Knowing them, she would be in infinitely more danger.

The Lookatmes thankfully didn't share his cabin, otherwise he might have abandoned the journey and let Crucis win. Instead he shared it with some pensive zoans in rumpled business suits, models horse and ibis, who left frequently for the dining car or the restroom or just to avoid the scowling bat. That was fine with Valle. As soon as the slow-rising vertrain was in motion, he settled in his seat and prepared for a long three days of watching the wallcreeper towers sink and disappear below him.



By the second day of his ascent, Valle couldn't stay in the cabin anymore. Two of the rings around the tracks that made up the vertrain were dining cars; one for the highest-paying passengers and one for others. More importantly, they had bars. Valle took his rucksack, which now contained everything he owned (some clothes and toiletries and an opened package of money he wished could be stolen) to find a seat at one of those.

The bar ran around the inner circle of the economy class restaurant car, moody and decorated with wood-grain laminate paneling but no living bartender. Instead, each place at the bar consisted of a stool to sit on and a nozzle in the back wall under which to place a glass, with a display for choosing a drink. Valle rented a tall glass and filled it with something bitter enough to burn his throat. On either side of him were dividers he could put up, to turn his tiny arc of bar into a private cubicle, but he didn't pull them out just yet.

Someone took the seat next to him. It was too late now.

He would have ignored them, but his eyes were drawn by the unmissable bright colors they wore. The squamate Lookatme selected a drink and leaned back against the bar to watch the view out the window.

"I thought you were supposed to resist vice," Valle said.

"I'm new, they'll give me a pass."

The zoan smiled and lifted their drink to him. They parted their colorful scarves to show a tattered pump station uniform below it. Like the one he had left bunched up on the bed when he abandoned

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his apartment. Now he remembered: he didn't know them personally, but they were another responder to the leak. They had dove into a flooded maintenance tunnel to tighten a key valve. Beneath that shirt was a pair of mechanical breathers replacing their lungs, which may or may not have helped them. Most likely, their vaguely ophidian face was another that shone in amber on the outside wall.

"Very new," Valle observed.

"A lot can happen in two days. Cedryk."

The name was familiar. Valle always avoided learning the names of more coworkers than he had to. But he liked Cedryk. The snake was pleasant and imperturbable. Though this life change of theirs belied that.

He turned in his seat to face out with them. Beyond the window that ran the full circumference of the diner car, a pair of wallcreeper towers zigzagged up the sea wall, laying over each other and occasionally intersecting. Somewhere in that mess was the apartment Valle had just left. He had never bothered to learn where.

"Are you surprised they let us leave?" the squamate asked.

He wasn't surprised the company had let *him* leave. If his former employers took issue with that, they would find themselves worried for their lives. They might become grateful to the Lookatmes.

"Yeah," he said.

"I thought, 'this must be super rare. Atlantis has been here for two hundred years. But do you know how often something like this happens? At least once a year. Atlantis could go at least once a year.'"

"You can't tell anyone that," Valle gave them a serious look.

"Only people who were there, yeah. We all signed the agreement."

Valle rubbed his eyes. It wasn't about the pump company's agreement; if the squamate talked too openly, they would die one day. Simply die, every cell killed at once, and possibly very publicly. People would say Osah *did* Look At Them, and didn't like what he saw.

"Yeah," he said again. And then, after a silence, "I had to be out of there, too."

"I think I do the same thing here as I did there," they indicated their getup, and then gave the sign of the Watcher. "In theory."

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"It pays better at least," Valle spared them a small curl of his lip. The snake grinned at that and mimed a toast.

"Honestly I regret it already," they sighed. "But I'll give it a month, maybe. Osah smites zoans twice as often as humans, anyway."

Valle couldn't help it. He asked, "Why do you think that is?"

"Some people say Osah didn't like that humans made us, so we're already sinful, and anything we do weighs twice as much. This team says we just stand out more."

"I like the theory that all humans look alike to Him, so they get away with more."

"I hadn't heard that one." Cedryk finished their drink, and by the time it was gone, so was their mirth. "This sucks."

Whether deliberately or not, they punctuated that with a wheezing noise from their breathing apparatus. Valle nodded. He let them see his voice box, but his fingers curled tightly around his glass. He didn't like to look at his hands, the scars running down their sides where the wing membranes had been cut away, and the knobs where the last two fingers had been shortened. There were a number of reasons: some regarding just himself, some involving Crucis, some involving Mr. Walter.

"You had the staph thing, didn't you?" the other indicated his wingless hands. "Most chiropters do, that I've met. I have to get new filters for my lungs. I don't know how I'll afford it."

If only Valle could have handed them a stack of globals, without Aequitas seizing it and bringing it back to him.

"And my liver's going," Cedryk rolled their eyes. "just a little at a time. And my damn tongue."

They raised their glass again. Drinking while they still could; who knew what quality of liver they could afford when the time came to replace it?

"Where are you going to go?" they asked.

"I don't know," Valle shrugged. "One of the continents."

"They seem safer," the snake observed.

"Only a mile or two below," Valle agreed. That wasn't his reason, of course. But it was true.

"Think you'll ever go to the surface?"

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“I hope not.” Valle didn’t countenance the sense of wonder others usually showed at the thought of the surface. It was a terrifying, alien idea to him.

“I hear Dresden has a surface bubble.”

“You should go,” Valle suggested. The scion of the last genetically sound zoan bloodline had a clinic for zoans in need of bionics, or other treatment. The hyenid couldn’t afford the finest for every supplicant, but surely Cedryk could apply for a new liver, or lungs that were less rough on their filters.

“Not on a pump station pension,” they stared into their cup. “Granted, Lookatmeing does pay better.”

The squamate smiled grimly, and their eyes drifted back to the sea wall. At this distance it looked like a model, thin plastic walls ready to split open at any moment. Valle didn’t blame them for the thought. He filled their glass from his own tap. That he could do, at least.