

AND ONTO THE NEXT  
By Kelly McGlade

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## CHARACTERS

AGENT, an observation agent of the intergalactic Foundation.

## TIME

The future. The lack of windows don't indicate a time.

## PLACE

A small, bare room, vaguely futuristic in design but too void of personality to truly tell.

*(Lights up on the AGENT sitting on the bed inset into an alcove in the wall. They take a deep breath and let it out. For a long time, they sit thinking in silence.)*

AGENT

I wonder how many times this has happened to me already. With all this memory-erasure business, I guess I'll never really know, huh? The Foundation... it all still feels so unreal. I mean, just yesterday I was back in my den on Gobonda – or EK-84-D, I guess it really was – taking my little fishing raft out into the swamp, totally oblivious to any of this. And then, just like that, this massive satellite ship comes cruising into the atmosphere and pulls me right out of my shoes. *Extracted*, they tell me. *Mission complete. Successful immersion*. And then they hit me with that brainwave machine of theirs and... I remembered. Like a set of doors opened in my brain, and suddenly my memory cache was doubled with... *cache*. I'm already sounding like them again.

*(A beat.)*

None of it was real. Not anymore, at least. The Gobondans never suspected a thing, but I guess since I was dropped in their wilderness with nothing but muscle memory to my name, it's not like *I* could have tipped them off. But I remember now. It all seems so obvious. The only reason the Foundation sent me to that planet was to do my job. To observe. To immerse in their civilization, learn their customs, take in their alien world from a resident's perspective. And hell, I was good at it! I built my own little hut in their village's outermost circle of dens. The Gobondans taught me how to catch boboda fish, how to fillet out the poisonous bits at the base of their barbs, how to tell a boboda from a gomba and not get my hand bitten off. They made fun of me for that the first time. "*Bo dondoro*," they always said – a kind of affectionate way of calling me an idiot. I deserved it, though.

*(A beat.)*

And now... it's like I was never there. The ship's satellite already wiped the planet. Erased my den, my tools, any trace of my presence. Picked every memory of me out of every last Gobondan. They'll wake up tomorrow and have no idea I was once a part of their community. And yeah, I guess if the Foundation's purely an observation agency, leaving as little trace of their passage in the ecosystem as possible is important, but... for just a few years, those Gobondans were my *family*. My neighbors. I might have looked funny to them, but they treated me just like anyone else... just like the Foundation wanted. Fuck. I just... I can't accept that I'll leave nothing behind. My whole time was *pointless*. I learned so much from that planet, and its inhabitants don't receive anything in return? The Foundation gets to mine my experience to add to their archives, great! Where does that leave me? Their A+ little agent who maybe just wants to forget I was ever assigned an intergalactic mission at all and go back to my fishing raft and cook one last boboda stew with my friends...

*(A long beat.)*

The... stew. I taught them that. I... didn't know how, but I knew that boiling fish in water with vegetables made something tasty. The Gobondans already boiled their boboda fish sometimes when I got there, but I introduced them to a recipe for stew.

*(A beat.)*

I still knew how to make stew, even after the Foundation wiped my memory. They always left the subconscious skills an agent would need to survive. Their brainwave machines are accurate enough. In wiping the memory of me from the Gobondans, they'd be able to carve around their survival skills. They might forget I ever shared a bowl of stew with them... but they wouldn't forget how to make it.

*(A beat.)*

Maybe it was real. If I was truly never there, they would have never made that little cultural exchange, unassuming enough to be ignored by the Foundation. Maybe... there was a point in spending two years of my life as a Gobonda, not for the Foundation, or even really for the Gobondans... but something for me. For just this little while, before it's onto the next planet and I forget it all again. I left my mark. A token of thanks to a civilization that'll never quite remember who gifted it, but will always know they were a friend.

*(A beat.)*

I wonder... how many other planets I've left tokens on.

*(Fade to black.)*