Geerstacker looked over the top of his glasses perched at the end of his long nose and sighed at the vision before him. It wasn’t that he particularly disliked Proximians any more than all the other entities he had to deal with so regularly now. No, it was just that compared to virtually every other living being so far encountered in the universe, they were really, really ugly.

“Look,” he said as kindly as he could manage. “I realise you’ve told me you want to get a summer job here and immerse yourself in Earth culture, but quite honestly you don’t have the correct entry papers.”

“Is it because I’m different?” said the creature. “It is, isn’t it, just because I fit the stereotypical and now very old fashioned view of an alien life-form?” It flicked one of its’ squid-like appendages irritably.

Geerstacker leaned back in his chair in the arrivals hall. “I assure you,” he replied, “that is not the case. As an officer in charge of vetting newcomers onto the planet I am always impartial, Mr, er, Mrs uh...”

“Grubb,” said the creature, blinking both sets of eyes. “I am a female of our species and we do not use an honorific but you may use the title Miss if it helps to ease our communications.”

“Well, then, Miss Grubb, as I was saying, any decision about whom to allow through our border is conducted strictly on the basis of merit. Now it says here,” he shuffled the large ream of papers before him, “it says here you have medical skills?”

“Yes I have,” replied Grubb. “I was tutored as an emergency Tech, grade 3 on Proxima b.”

“Would I be right in thinking that all your patients were, therefore, Proximians?”

“Yes, of course.”

 “Whose physiology is markedly different to Humans?”

 Grubb folded her tentacles. “Possibly,” she said.

Geerstacker leafed through a few more sheets. “Do you have any other qualifications?” He asked.

Grubb tapped an appendage on the chair’s armrest. “Well I once spent a whole Proximian year teaching advanced baking skills on a summer camp.”

“Oh? And what kind of things can you cook?”

 “Oh, where do I start? Fresh Lavees on Coulten bread, Slow stewed heart of Windlaws on a bed of tenderised Grallot bugs. You name it, I’ve cooked it.”

“Lavees?” asked Geerstacker.

“It’s a type of Oligochaete. I think you call them Earthworms.

Geerstacker’s smile became fixed. “I think you may find your particular talents wasted here,” he managed.

He peered at the growing line of new hopefuls, all waiting to be interviewed, sighed once more and made a decision.

“You have a six-month visitor’s visa,” he told her. “If, by some miracle, you find paid employment within that time you can apply for an extended stay. Please keep this office advised of any changes to your address. Good day.”

As he stamped the passport, Grubb laid a sticky tentacle on his sleeve.

“I am part human, you know.”

Staring with horrified fascination at the drool even now sliding towards his cuff, Geerstacker failed to voice the question that jumped for attention in his mind – ‘Which part?’

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Grubb stepped out of the terminal building and into the smog-laden and busy street. She drew a deep breath into her single lung and exhaled deeply.

Earth! She was finally here. Goodness knows how many times she’d read and re-read the old brochure. She could see it in her mind’s eye, the descriptive passages with the old street names, the back-street bistros and bars, the galleries and museums. Now it was all here ready for discovery! But first she had a task to do.

She rubbed her tentacles in happy anticipation and stepped off the sidewalk into the path of an oncoming taxi cab.

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The cab driver finished cleaning the gloop from his windshield and turned back angrily to the now dishevelled Grubb.

“Do you know how much it’s going to cost me to clean up my ride?” He stated.

“I am most apologetically sorry,” sniffed Grubb. “I unfortunately do not have sufficient cash with which to recompense you for having run me over.”

“Hah!” snorted the driver, “just another darn immigrant down her to take our jobs!” He slammed the cab door.

“Why don’t you just haul it back to whatever stinking moon you came from?”

“Proxima b,” called Grubb after the receding vehicle, “and it’s a planet, not a moon.”

She heaved her body onto the nearest bench and closed both sets of eyes.

“Hey, bud, you looking for a job?”

It wasn’t an unpleasant voice. In fact, it sounded friendly, friendlier, anyway than the cab driver. Not that Grubb had much experience with human communication.

She looked around 180 degrees without turning her body. There was another Proximian standing behind her. In most respects, he was identical to her apart from a rather expanded central midriff; and the missing tentacle -and the eye patch.

“I could not help noticing that little altercation.” He stated. “Am I right in guessing you are new in town?”

Grubb nodded and turned the rest of her body towards the speaker.

“I am new to Earth.” She corrected. “I am here to immerse myself in human culture and to find suitable and sustained employment.”

“Well,” said the Proximian insinuating his bulk slightly closer, “it could be that I might be able to help you there, Ma’am.”

His name, apparently, was Blurb and he had been on Earth now for nearly ten years. One of the first to arrive, he told Grubb how his original optimism for a bright future had not exactly panned out.

“Oh, it all seemed good for a while, until the novelty died away. Holding down jobs became more difficult. Humans began to fear us, then loathe us, then they just ignored us.”

“But the brochure, it said...”

“The old brochures don’t apply anymore,” said Blurb.

“Oh. I, I thought in a way I was coming home.”

“Home?” queried Blurb as he negotiated a way through the streets.

“I’m part human,” she replied. “I got the DNA jab last year.

“Oh, yeah,” intoned Blurb looking sidelong at her, “heard about them. It's a pre-op thing, isn't it? Illegal too, so I heard."

They swung into a quiet alley and he turned to face her.

"Just what are you here for?" He demanded suddenly.

Grubb looked down, shamefaced, at her scaly feet.

"I, I’m going to have the op," she whispered. "I mean look at me - at us! Don't you feel disgusted with the body you're in?"

Blurb examined his stump of a tentacle. "Not really. Why should I? I'm Proximian and proud!"

“Well, I’m not proud. Ever since I was a little squib I knew I was different. Even at school I was the only one trying to cultivate a head of hair,” she brushed the flailing anenomies clinging precariously to her dome.

“And what about these?” she asked flapping her tentacles. “It’s too many limbs. I mean, exactly how many do you need?”

Blurb examined his own stump. “Well I suppose one could get by with only six,” he conceded, “but you’d never play the Bishckhaar again.”

“I’m not musical.”

“Well what about Proximian art – You’d never hold all the brushes.”

“Or am I artistic – in any way.

“And cooking!” went on Blurb. “How could you possibly crachan your Lavees over a slow heat at the same time as croplansicate the Windlaws? It can’t be done.”

“I,” she hesitated, “I have simple tastes.”

“What about your parents? How would they feel to see their little squib…”, he sought for the word, “…amputated and disfigured?”

“No it’s not like that anymore!” The brochure’s advertisement floated before her eyes.

**Tired of your body?’ It had read. ‘Fed up with ooze trickling onto your loved ones? We want to help you! Undergo a simple course of (RelativelyTM) painless medication today**

**and begin your journey to corporeal satisfaction!** *Disclaimer: RelativelyTM does not in any way guarantee the level of discomfort you may experience. Side-effects can include death.’*

“I really want this, Blurb. Please can you show me where the medical facility is?”

He sighed. “All right I will. But don’t blame me when it’s too late to change your mind!”

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The Doctor steepled his hands together in his best professional manner. “Well, now,” he began. “It’s always very important that we discuss a process like this with the patient first.

There are deep psychological issues that need to be explored. You may have concerns that you wish to expand upon. Counselling could perhaps help you examine…”

He looked down at the small bag of glittering jewels that Grubb held out.

“Is 9 O’clock tomorrow too early for you?” he asked.

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She was pre-opped and ready when the first rock came through the window. Looking out through the smashed glass, Blurb swallowed hard at the large and angry crowd below.

How did they get to hear about this?” He asked the Doctor who shrugged. “Search me. We are always very discreet about our patients.”

“Er.”

They both looked over to Grubb. “It might be my fault. I may have kind of announced it. On Unipage.”

The Doctor polished his glasses. “Is that the site with about 20 billion life-form subscribers?” He asked.

“That’s it! Do you use it too?”

“No.” He replied shortly. “But I can show you a few angry people outside right now, holding what appear to be weapons by the way, who probably do.”

 “What are we going to do?” wailed Blurb as he dodged another brick.

“You do know, of course,” said the Doctor with a little laugh, “that Trans-Alien operations are, and I quote, ‘…not just illegal but against the laws of nature and punishable by a fine not exceeding everything you possess, including life’?”

“But I want to stand up and be counted!” shouted Grubb. “I want to show the LGBT-TA community there is nothing to fear. I want to open my heart to the universe!”

“A wish that is very likely to come true.” replied the Doctor, looking out of the window. “In full colour.”

“Doc!” Yelled Blurb. “They’ve kicked the door in! What do we do?”

The Doctor pushed his glasses firmly onto his brow.

“To the operating room!”

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When the roaring crowd finally burst through the especially hardened doors they stopped short and gazed at the new and improved version of Grubb.

She no longer oozed green gunge or slimed oily tentacles. No more would her scales frighten little children and old ladies. She regarded them levelly with her one set of eyes.

“Do you see me now?” She asked the stunned audience.

She held out her perfectly-formed arms. “Can you not accept me now? Now that I am one of you?”

Slowly, one by one, the crowd dropped the weapons, bricks and rocks they had been holding, turned and walked silently out of the building, leaving nothing of their presence behind apart from 14 broken windows, 3 doors off their hinges and a miniature wall of rubble.

Grubb lowered her arms. “Do they, do they accept me now?” she trembled.

The Doctor averted his eyes. Grubb reached out for the Proximian. Blurb flinched.

“I fear you may have entered a new realm,” whispered the Doctor. “What you have is a billowing cloak – Not quite human or otherwise.” He paused. “Acceptance will be – a challenge.”

“But not impossible.” Grubb felt the Proximian’s sets of eyes on her as he sat opposite. “What about you? How do you feel?” He asked.

Grubb looked out of the shattered windows over the city buildings to where the early sun was rising.

“Happy,” she said. And she smiled.

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