Girl

The girl is tied to a mast near the bow of an otherwise empty deck. She is naked, but the climate is temperate and she is never cold. The rains come one or five times per day. She doesn’t mind. It doesn’t really fit in with her plans, but it doesn’t contradict them either.

She has no idea how long she’s been here, at least not in words. In fact, she has no ideas in words.

The crew leaves her alone now. She knows that the helmsman wants her for himself, and that he is a shallow, boring, ugly man. It doesn’t bother her. She also knows that he will be gone long before he gets up the courage to cross the captain and crew. In fact, his time will come to an end soon, when the ship refuses him further medical service, after an accident with an automated deck hatch.

The cook brings her food once a standard day, twice if he’s feeling generous. The cook is only the cook because he wishes it. There is no other art to occupy his fertile mind. The girl likes him, but her abilities are not strong enough yet to communicate with him. She will let him live.

Occasionally, when the ship is quiet and the orbiter has nothing to say, she thinks of her father and mother. They, she knows, still love her, long after her disappearance, and would take her back, words or no, without a moment’s hesitation. She cannot reach them easily, but she would send love if she could. When the atmosphere is just right, she gets pictures from the colonizers sometimes. They lack context, and are dim at best, but she feels warm when she gets them. The people are intruders here, always have been, but they are a benign intrusion for the most part, and the world can tolerate a few aliens.

The other children of the colony do not answer her coherently. Their skills have not developed as hers have. It is the nature of evolution to experiment constantly, and the world has time. She keeps track of what is happening in the little concrete world, but it is of no consequence in the long run. She will know what to do when it is time to do it.

Ship says this, ship says that. It is a stupid ship, really. The orbiter is much more interesting, seeing as much as it does, and the cruiser more interesting still. The crew have no idea that the ship and the cruiser chat, or that she does, and she knows that if they did, she would die. She never oversteps, but soon she will be able to cause movements in their bodies.

The girl is never bored. Trees, fish, sluggish reptilians, they all have something to say, even if it’s usually the same things over and over again. She sees dimly the level on which they all communicate: infinitesimal particles of information, little rings and smears, so small that there is no difference between thought and matter and energy. The humans and almost-humans, even with their implants, are crude and gross creatures, unable to work the fundamental levels, and so will be kept in their colony, behaviourally uninteresting but exotic. Perhaps, with the aid of the cruiser, they will be led to create the technology they need to become one.

She is perfectly aware that the ship will pass within a few days of the colonists, the only remaining humans other than the crew. The orbiter tells her where they are, and she waits. She is very, very good at waiting. Her abilities are growing stronger with every moment, and soon she’ll be ready.

The orbiter is directly overhead now, tracking their movements, laser at the ready should the helmsman grow too bold. The ship will never be able to negotiate the main channel, overgrown and swampy as it is, but it will come close enough. The medic will be waiting, having crossed the island, hiding in the bushes at the side of the channel with food and clothing, and they will begin the long walk. The medic knows about her and the children. He doesn’t know how it works, just that it does, and she has long since forgiven him for his time of weakness. She will let him live. She will free his voice.

The cook brings her a meal. She tries his mind again, sending a picture of herself without the leash. He looks at her long and hard. No matter. It will take a long time or two to negotiate the channel. And she will live as long as the reptilians on the beach, for whom time is a game rarely worth playing.